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CONSEQUENCES OF DESTRUCTIVE LEADERSHIP THROUGH  
THE EXPERIENCES OF MILLENNIAL FOLLOWERS

by

RHONDA M. MARTIN, BS, MS, EMBA

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

December 2014

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Absael Antelo. Your support, patience, and reassurance in my ability are appreciated. There were days when I was not sure I would finish the dissertation, but your continued encouragement helped me achieve my goal. Dr. Osman Ozturgut, it was a true pleasure to be a student in your class and I am grateful for your guidance and support through the dissertation. Dr. Daniel Dominguez, without hesitation you agreed to be apart of the committee team and I appreciate your interest and trust in my research topic. In addition, I am thankful to the participants in the study. I know it was difficult to recount negative experiences, and I am humbled by your generosity in supporting my research. Shalom to all.

Rhonda M. Martin, BS, MS, EMBA

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this research study to my dearest best friend and sister, Maria Martin. Your support has been instrumental to my success in the pursuit of this PhD, and you have been my rock during the tough times. Thank you Maria, for your unconditional support as I embarked on this upward journey of self-discovery. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the support from my canine family. There were many late nights in the home office as I researched and wrote papers for school. You sacrificed dog walks and attention in support of my success. More hikes are in the near future my friends. Shalom.

## CONSEQUENCES OF DESTRUCTIVE LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE EXPERIENCES OF MILLENNIAL FOLLOWERS

Rhonda M. Martin, PhD

University of the Incarnate Word, 2014

Destructive leadership has serious detrimental effects on organizations and their employees. Today U.S. companies are spending an estimated \$23 billion annually on healthcare costs (e.g. chronic absenteeism, high turnover, and dissatisfaction) resulting from the negative impacts of destructive leaders (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006). This emerging theory was worthy of additional research because of the adverse effects it has on the personal and professional lives of followers.

According to Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007), the success of a destructive leader depends on susceptible followers (Millennials) and a conducive environment, which creates a toxic triangle. In 2009, Trickey & Hyde conducted a 10-year qualitative study that focused on the dark side of leadership from the generational perspective. They discovered that Millennials prefer to abide by the rules, strive to please others, deliver work of high quality, have little trust in leadership, and demonstrate low self-efficacy.

The purpose of this interpretive qualitative study was to describe the meaning of consequences of destructive leadership from the followers' lived experiences.

The two research questions answered in this study were: (1) what were the followers' lived experiences when working for leaders perceived as destructive; and (2) how did destructive behaviors affect the personal and professional lives of the followers?

In the study, I conducted 10 personal interviews. The participant demographic characteristics included individuals from the Millennial generation, completion of a four-year college degree, and worked fulltime for five years or more. The interview questions elicited data on experiences and the impact of working for a perceived destructive leader. The results indicated that the participants had an in-depth understanding about destructive leadership behaviors and were adversely affected by the destructive leaders. This is reason for concern for our future generation of leaders because supervisors who have abusive tendencies were victims of destructive leadership in their career (Aryee, Chen, Sun, and Debrah, 2007; Hoobler and Brass, 2006; Tepper, 2007).

Research in this area is growing and this study provided valuable contributions to the research community that is focused on the dark side of leadership. It will help educate followers and their organizations about the detrimental impacts of destructive leadership.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Context of the Study .....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Researcher’s History and Perspective.....	4
Purpose of Research.....	5
Research Questions.....	5
Overview of Methodology .....	5
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Significance of Study .....	9
Limitations and Assumptions .....	10
Definition of Terms.....	11
Summary .....	12
Chapter 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .....	14
Emerging Field of Destructive Leadership .....	15
Destructive Leadership Characteristics.....	15
Hostility and trait negative affectivity .....	15
Personalized power demands and a pessimistic view of the world .....	16
Personalized charisma.....	16
The dark triad of personalities .....	17
Narcissism.....	18



## Table of Contents-Continued

Machiavellianism .....	18
Psychopathic personality .....	18
Destructive Leadership Behaviors .....	18
Abusive supervision .....	19
Petty tyranny .....	19
Workplace bullying .....	20
Consequences of Destructive Leadership Behavior .....	20
Followers and Followership.....	23
Susceptible followers .....	24
Conducive Environment .....	27
Summary .....	28
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY .....	30
Research Approach .....	30
Research Design.....	31
Research Questions .....	31
Selection of Participants .....	31
Interview Setting.....	32
Research Instrument.....	33
Protection of Human Subjects .....	34
Data Collection and Procedure .....	35
Participant interviews.....	35
Collecting verbal data .....	35

## Table of Contents-Continued

Data Analysis and Interpretation .....	37
Organized and read the data.....	37
Coding of data.....	37
Categories and themes .....	38
Synthesis and Summarizing of Data .....	39
Role of the Qualitative Researcher .....	40
Trustworthiness and Credibility.....	41
Triangulation.....	41
Member checking.....	42
Summary .....	42
Chapter 4: FINDINGS.....	43
Participants' Profiles .....	44
Findings.....	45
Research question one.....	46
Theme #1 .....	47
Theme #2.....	53
Summary of Research Question One.....	57
Research question two .....	57
Theme #3.....	58
Theme #4 .....	64
Summary of Research Question Two .....	66

## Table of Contents-Continued

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	68
Discussion of Findings.....	68
Research Question One.....	69
Research Question Two .....	72
Conclusion .....	75
Implications for Theory .....	76
Implications for Practice .....	77
Limitations and Recommendations.....	77
References.....	79
Appendix A: IRB Approval Form .....	87
Appendix B: CITI Certification .....	88
Appendix C: Subject Consent to take Part in a Study .....	89
Appendix D: Letter to Potential Subjects for the Study .....	91
Appendix E: Interview Guided Questions .....	93
Appendix F: Qualitative Codebook .....	94
Appendix G: Copyright Approval for Susceptible Circle.....	95
Appendix H: Copyright Approval for Toxic Triangle Model .....	96

## LIST OF TABLES

1: Participant Selection Criteria .....	33
2: Category Characteristics .....	38
3: Theme Characteristics.....	39
4: Participants Demographic Characteristics .....	43
5: Research Question One: Themes One and Two .....	46
6: Research Question Two: Themes Three and Four.....	58

## LIST OF FIGURES

1: The Toxic Triangle .....	7
2: The Susceptible Circle .....	25

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **Context of the Study**

Leadership is a phenomenon that has intrigued scholars and practitioners alike around the globe for decades. To date, approximately 66 different leadership theory domains exist. These domains developed by scholars explain the role of leaders within organizations and in dynamic social networks. In a recent critical review of leadership, the 66 domains were categorized as either an established theory, emergent theory, or thematic (Dinh et al, 2014). A majority of the established or emergent theories of leadership has focused on the theoretical approaches and integration complexities of constructive leadership in order to understand the positive behaviors and traits of leaders. In higher education specifically, business school students learn transformational, transactional, and charismatic leadership and how to acquire the skills used to identify goals and influence followers to pursue their goals (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). In addition to the established theories, emerging theories have received the attention from scholars in the new millennium such as authentic, ethical, strategic, and destructive leadership.

The constructive theories reveal how leaders are expected to inspire others, have integrity, be ethical, empower employees, be a positive role model, and support the organizational goals (Schaubroeck, Walumbwa, Ganster, & Kepes, 2007). In formal education, organizations spend an estimated \$50 billion annually to develop leaders (Fulmer & Conger, 2004). Many scholars have focused on the positive side of leadership for half a century. In spite of the many years of research and the organizational investment in developing leaders, there exists a trend of poor-performing leaders. It is estimated that 50% to 75% of leaders are ineffective and do not exhibit the characteristics of successful leaders (Hogan & Hogan, 2002).

In contrast to constructive leadership, in the past two decades destructive leadership has piqued the interest of scholars. The organizational science community has recognized the term destructive leadership that Dr. Ståle Einarsen and his colleagues devised. Destructive leadership is a systematic and repeated behavior by a leader, supervisor, or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates. (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007, p. 208)

The extent of the definition highlights the outcomes of destructive behavior to include aggressive physical and verbal behaviors directed towards subordinates and the organization (Einarsen et al., 2007). When a leader's intent is to deliberately sabotage the legitimate interest of the organization and creates turmoil for internal and external stakeholders, the leader is destructive (Padilla et al., 2007). These behaviors must be conducted systematically and repeatedly to be defined as destructive. The definition excludes an isolated event when a leader has a bad day or makes an occasional poor decision.

Society has witnessed a prevalence of destructive leadership by leaders who have abused their power resulting in spectacular, high profile failures in the energy and financial sectors and have contributed to immense economic and social losses in organizations (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010; Schaubroeck et al., 2007). The leaders who engage in destructive leadership behavior violate and sabotage the organization's goals, tasks, resources, effectiveness, and the wellbeing of employees (Einarsen et al., 2007). Destructive leadership has serious detrimental effects on organizations and employees.

The victims of destructive leadership suffer emotionally, physically, and mentally, which has a debilitating impact on how they function in both the work environment and in their

personal lives. According to Hogan and Kaiser (2005), roughly 65% to 75% of employees believe their boss is the worst part of the job. Followers of a destructive leader experience high levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, and tension (Tepper, 2000). Although this field of study has grown in the past two decades, significant research is required to fully understand this emerging theory. The identified constructs of this phenomenon provide valuable contributions to the study of leadership and how it affects subordinates' work environments and personal lives.

### **Statement of Problem**

Destructive leadership is a practical and theoretical problem where the destructive leader negatively affects the followers in the workforce that have resulted in financial losses (Padilla et al., 2007). It has been estimated that U.S. Corporations are paying \$23 billion annually for health care costs related to absenteeism, decrease in productivity, and legal fees associated with destructive leadership (Tepper et al., 2006). In addition, on average about 5% of a single company's operating budget annually funds the costs of company turnover (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). According to Padilla et al., (2007), the success of a destructive leader depends on susceptible followers (Millennials) and a conducive environment, which creates a toxic triangle.

In 2009, Trickey & Hyde conducted a ten-year qualitative study that focused on the dark side of leadership from the generational perspective. In spite of the negative opinions about Millennials, the results from the study revealed that this generation of followers prefers to abide by the rules, strives to please others, delivers work of high quality, has little trust in leadership, and demonstrates low self-efficacy.

These findings are an indication that Millennial followers may be susceptible to leadership with a destructive demeanor because they are compliant and less assertive with those in supervisory positions.



In summary, a majority of the research on destructive leadership has been quantitative leaving a gap in qualitative research. In particular, there has been little to no use of personal interviews to explore the Millennials' lived experiences working for a destructive leader in a service industry.

### **Researcher's History and Perspective**

After graduation from college, I started to work for a small defense-contracting firm. Later I joined the Air Force officer corps and served as a Contracting / Acquisition Officer. After separating from the military service, I continued working for the Air Force as a civilian. For years I worked in the government sector and was exposed to a toxic work environment caused by several destructive leaders.

The destructive conduct demonstrated such narcissistic behaviors such as self-absorption, inflating one's position to abuse power, and climbing the ladder at the expense of subordinates. I also witnessed public humiliation of subordinates as the destructive leader publicly reprimanded them in front of their peers. Initially, I would shrug off those bad behaviors, but over the course of a year it started to affect my job satisfaction and resulted in an emotional exhaustion that percolated into my personal life. At that point, I knew it was time to take action. I searched for other employment opportunities and resigned from the government. It was a tough decision because I loved my job and knew my work had a positive impact on the soldiers. However, it had become unacceptably difficult to function in a toxic work environment.

My experiences working for destructive leaders are the reason I am motivated and passionate about this research and believe my experiences and those of the participants in this study will provide awareness and educate future leaders of the detrimental impact of negative leadership.

## **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this interpretive qualitative study was to describe how participants interpreted the consequences of destructive leadership behavior through their lived experiences and perceptions when they worked in a service organization. This research was uniquely different from previous studies because it used personal interviews that provided a platform for the followers to articulate how the destructive behaviors adversely impacted their personal and professional lives such as their career choices, approach to ethical dilemmas, and their level of trust and respect for leaders. Previous research used quantitative surveys to describe the followers' experiences. The use of the qualitative method to study the consequences of destructive behaviors will offer an in-depth awareness about the adverse impact those destructive behaviors have on followers (Krasikova et al., 2013).

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions that guided the interpretive study were:

1. What were the followers' lived experiences when working for leaders perceived as destructive?
2. How did destructive behaviors affect the personal and professional lives of the followers?

## **Overview of Methodology**

The qualitative research was the optimal methodology for this study because of the interest in the human experience and how individuals construct meaning in their lives at a particular point in time (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Merriam, 2002). As a qualitative researcher, there are several approaches to employ to guide your research, such as interpretive, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative, ethnography, and case studies (Creswell, 2014). According to

Merriam (2002), the interpretive study “is used to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences” (p. 38). The interpretive qualitative approach for this study explored the consequences of destructive leadership through the follower’s lived experiences. This approach models phenomenology and symbolic interaction. The interpretive approach is interested in the how people conceptualize meaning constructed by events in their lives, which is indicative of phenomenology (Merriam, 2002). Symbolic interaction focuses attention on how people interact within their society. Thus, the interpretive qualitative researcher is interested in how human beings interpret their experiences, how they conceptualize their world, and the described meaning of their experiences (Merriam, 2002).

The constructivist paradigm is interested in how people interpret their experiences and what it means in their world. This approach is inductive and integrates information in order to understand the phenomenon studied and develops a meaning from the collected data (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998). The data collected through personal interviews, analysis of transcripts, and emerging themes created a final product with a rich description of the study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework is a structural lens used by a researcher to connect “concepts, terms, definitions, models, and theories of a particular literature base” (p. 67) to frame the meaning and understanding a study (Merriam, 2009). Finding a theoretical framework for this study involved reading vast amounts of scholarly articles and having numerous discussions with professors. The conceptual model of the toxic triangle, developed by Dr. Art Padilla, Dr. Robert Hogan, and Dr. Robert Kaiser (2007, see Figure 1), was chosen to support the meaning of research, in particular the susceptible followers component.

Figure 1.

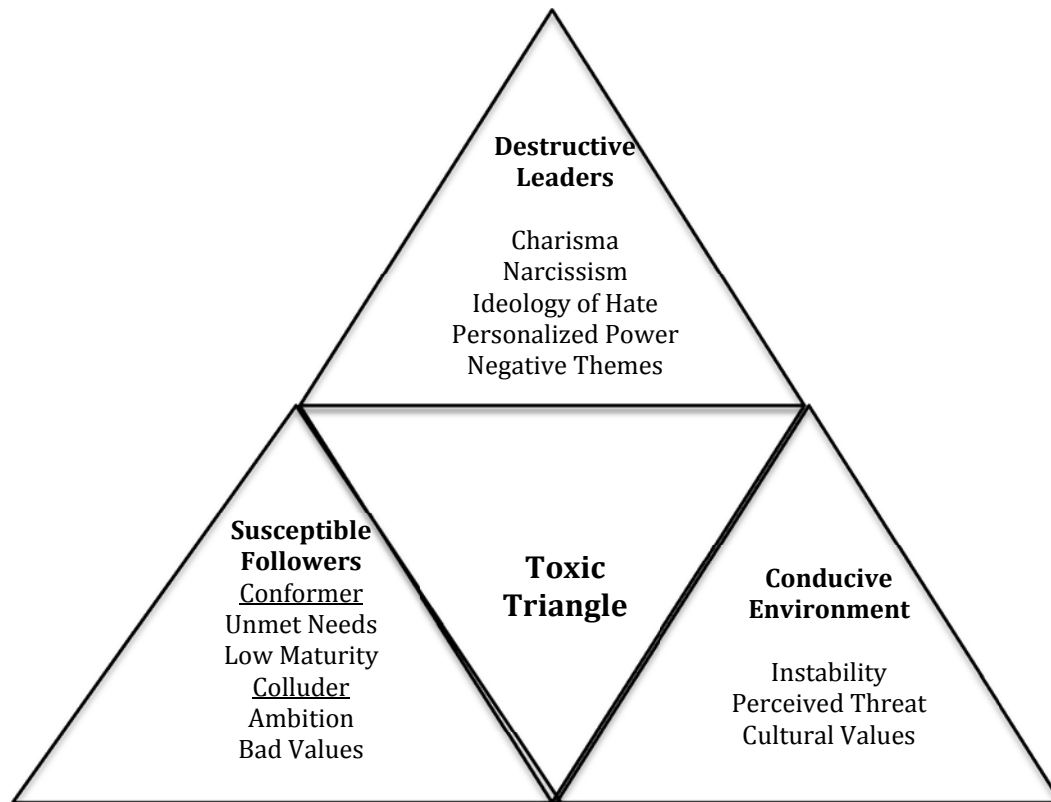


Figure 1. The toxic triangle: elements in three domains related to destructive leadership. From “The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments” By Padilla, A., Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B., 2007, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18, p. 180. Copyright 2007 by Elsevier Limited. Reprinted with permission.

The model derived from an analysis of literature that revealed the relationship between the three elements: destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and a conducive environment. The destructive leadership element illustrates the leader type of characteristics. Charisma is a leadership characteristic that has been associated to good and bad leaders. Destructive leaders use charisma to create an environment of fear and insecurity, which enhances their personal power (Padilla et al., 2007). These leaders use power to enforce their unethical agenda through coercion and control.

Another destructive leadership characteristic is narcissism, where a leader is self-absorbed, arrogant, and has a skewed sense of reality (Padilla et al., 2007; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). The other two characteristics of a destructive leader are indicative of those who had negative life experiences, which created a pessimistic mindset and distorted views of life (Padilla et al., 2007). For example, a child abused by their parents or bullied by others may abuse power and be indifferent to traumatic events (Kellerman, 2004). Furthermore, a destructive leader who demonstrates some or all of the described characteristics is not successful in isolation but with the support of susceptible followers and organizations that enable the destructive leader.

The susceptible follower element describes two different types of followers: the conformers and colluders. Conformers demonstrate a low level of self-efficacy, diminished self-esteem, and are reliant on the leader to meet their hierarchy of physiological, safety, belongingness and other needs (Maslow, 1954). They may also demonstrate immoral behavior because of their psychological immaturity and follow by blind obedience (Padilla et al., 2007). The other type of follower, the colluder, will follow the destructive leader because of shared beliefs and be motivated by personal gain (Padilla et al., 2007). In summary, conformers are passive and succumb to the destructive behavior, and the colluders are self-serving and actively support the leaders bad behavior for personal gain.

The final element, the conducive environment, enables destructive leadership when there is instability, collectivistic culture, and lack of checks and balances (Padilla et al., 2007). This creates the perfect social system for a destructive leader to abuse power, manipulate followers, and enforce their vision for the organization. In an unstable environment, a destructive leader is quick to establish order and eventually exploits their position of power. The cultural values of an organization will influence the destructive leader's behavior when there is avoidance of

uncertainty, collectivism, and a high power distance (Hofstede, 1991). The absence of checks and balances creates the optimum environment for a destructive leader to flourish and have absolute power (Padilla et al., 2007). When centralized power exists, the culture is reliant on the destructive leader and creates an ineffective organization. For instance, the three branches of government provide oversight and create balance of power. If the branches did not exist, the misuse of power would create dysfunction and chaos.

In summary, the toxic triangle model points out that destructive leadership does not exist in a vacuum, but requires a destructive leader, susceptible followers, and a conducive environment to be successful. However, there is a dearth of qualitative research dedicated to understanding the followers lived experiences with destructive leaders and the impact to their personal and professional lives. This qualitative study focused on those experiences in a service industry to enhance the susceptible follower domain in the theoretical model.

### **Significance of Study**

Approximately 10% to 16% of American employees endure the acts of negative leadership regularly (Harvey, Stoner, Hockwarter, & Kacmar, 2007). Today there is a deficiency in the understanding of the overall construct, destructive leadership behavior (Thoroughgood, Tate, Sawyer, & Jacobs, 2012). The intent of this research study is to accomplish three goals.

“The first goal is to contribute to the body of knowledge and develop an understanding of the consequences of destructive leadership and how it affects the Millennial generation in the service industry. The focus of this qualitative study is the Millennial generation because by 2018, 40% the workforce will be employees from the Millennial generation (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). The second goal is to educate current leaders on how to actively recognize destructive behaviors before those behaviors contaminate the employees and the organizational

environment. In 2013, the Gallup Business Journal published a five-year research study that found that only 18% of managers have the ability to develop high performing teams and cultures in the U.S. (Beck & Harter, 2013). The low percentage of constructive leaders is costing companies billions each year. The number of constructive managers will be increased through management courses at the universities. The third and final goal of the study is to provide teachers in academia with the information to educate students about how destructive leaders affect followers and teach them the skills to be constructive leaders.

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

When I conducted the study, there were a few limitations. In selecting the participants, it was important to consider their need for a safe and comfortable environment to share their stories. The research topic was difficult for some participants to talk about, which increased the need for privacy when conducting interviews. The other limitation was me as the researcher. Before conducting this research, I had experienced working for a destructive leader.

As an interpretive researcher, I remained cognizant of my biases and assumptions when I collected and analyzed that data. In doing so, I relied on the analytical processes and tools explained in chapter three, the high ethical standards from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative coursework, and the Institutional Review Board at the University of the Incarnate Word. In addition, I relied on other research studies on destructive leadership to support the findings.

I identified the following assumptions (1) the participant's responses to the questions were answered in full honestly from personal experiences; and (2) the participants understood the defined terms of destructive leadership and consequences as it was used in the research.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were fundamental to this study.

**Anti-Subordinate.** Behaviors that violate the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining or sabotaging the motivation, well-being, or job satisfaction of subordinates (Einarsen et al., 2007, p. 211).

**Consequences of Destructive Leadership.** Include but not limited to psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, deviance, somatic health complaints, organizational injustice, and family directed aggression (Tepper, 2007, p. 274).

**Destructive Leadership.** A systematic and repeated behavior by a leader, supervisor, or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates (Einarsen et al., 2007, p. 208).

**Constructive Leadership.** These leaders act in accordance with the legitimate interests of the organization, supporting and enhancing the goals, tasks, and strategy of the organization as well as making optimal use of organizational resources. They are concerned with the welfare of their subordinates while simultaneously focused on goal attainment and the effective use of resources in the service of the legitimate interests of the organization (Einarsen et al., 2007, p. 214).

**Susceptible Follower.** These followers are unable or unwilling to resist the domineering and abuse from destructive leaders. There are two types of susceptible followers: conformers and colluders. Conformers comply with destructive leaders out of fear and Colluders actively participate in a destructive leader's agenda (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 183).



Toxic Leader. These are individuals who by dint of their destructive behaviors and dysfunctional personal qualities generate a serious and enduring poisonous effect on individuals, families, organizations, communities, and even entire societies they lead (Lipman-Blumen, 2005, p. 18).

## **Summary**

The dissertation presented is five chapters including the introduction in chapter one. The second chapter reviews the related literature that incorporates the toxic triangle model, destructive leader, susceptible follower, and conducive work environment.

Chapter 2 explores the emerging body of research on destructive leadership including the constructs and characteristics of toxic leaders. It also includes a review of the follower and followership literature, in particular the susceptible circle taxonomy that examines characteristics of followers who are conformers. The final section of Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of the conducive work environment. Although the study focuses on the follower, it is important to recognize the significance the organizational culture has on the role of the follower.

Chapter 3, methodology, explains why the interpretive qualitative design is the best approach for this study. This chapter provides an in-depth description of the research process, including data collection from personal interviews and the procedural steps used for data analysis and interpretation. The final section describes the role of a qualitative researcher and discusses the efforts used to maintain trustworthiness and credibility.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the qualitative study. The themes that emerged from the data collection answer the two research questions. Rich descriptions and previous literature are included to support the themes.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the dissertation, the theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter II: Review of Related Literature**

Chapter two examines previous research literature written on destructive leadership. The purpose of this literature review is to present the current research on the emerging theory of destructive leadership. For the past 50 years, scholars have studied constructive leadership. Researchers have challenged the research on destructive leadership because leadership has a positive connotation (Howell & Avolio, 1992; Kellerman, 2004). The term destructive leadership seems a contradiction. The disagreement lies in the understanding of leadership. According to Burns (2003), Hitler, Stalin, and other dictators used their position of power to enforce coercion and manipulated their people to conduct heinous crimes against humankind. Another argument is these men were leaders and used their positions of power to pursue destructive objectives (Kellerman, 2004). In the past two decades, the emerging theory of destructive leadership behavior has grown and gained credibility, and this literature review provides insight into the manifestations identified by scholars.

The literature review reflects the three elements (a destructive leader, susceptible followers, and conducive environment) of the toxic triangle model (see *figure 1*). The research focused on the consequences of destructive leadership from the follower's experiences in the service industry, but it was necessary to provide a holistic view of all three elements to illustrate the spirit of the framework. Section one explained the emerging field of destructive leadership, section two described the characteristics of destructive leaders, section three examined the behaviors and consequences related to destructive leaders, section four explained the susceptible follower profile, section five briefly described the conducive environment, and the final section synthesized the review.

## **Emerging Field of Destructive Leadership**

The pervasiveness of destructive leadership has gained increased attention by scholars. Previous research has identified several characteristics and behaviors that describe the emerging theory of destructive leadership. The most common characteristics include hostility and negative trait affectivity, demand for power and a negative mindset, personalized charisma, and the dark triad of personalities (McCelland, 1975; Padilla et al., 2007; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Samnani & Singh, 2013; Schaubroeck et al., 2007). The leaders with these characteristics are potentially motivated to engage in destructive behaviors that are anti-subordinate and cause harm to followers (Einarsen et al., 2007). The mistreatment of subordinates exists through several destructive behaviors including, but not limited to, abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000), social undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002), and toxic leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

## **Destructive Leadership Characteristics**

The analysis of literature suggests there are certain personality traits that predict a leader's tendency to engage in bad behavior and actions (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013; Padilla et al., 2007; Schaubroeck et al., 2007). The destructive characteristics include hostility and trait negative affectivity, personal power demands, a pessimistic view of the world, personal charisma, and a dark triad of personalities: narcissistic, Machiavellian, and psychopathic.

**Hostility and trait negative affectivity (NA).** Leaders who display hostility and trait NA have a pessimistic outlook on life, are apathetic toward others, and lack the ability to effectively communicate (verbally and nonverbally), which adversely affects the subordinates (Schaubroeck et al., 2007). Supervisors who possess these traits believe people are motivated out of self-interests and, as a result, the leader develops distrust for others, specifically their subordinates,

and reacts in a hostile manner. They are also argumentative, easily angered, and have a low frustration tolerance. Those who display the trait negative affectivity have chronic negative emotions, are emotionally unstable, and less effective as a leader (Schaubroeck et al., 2007).

**Personal power demands and a pessimistic view of world.** According to David McClelland's (1975) theory of needs, explained two types of power. Socialized power is associated with leaders who are effective, place service before self, demonstrate high emotional intelligence, and empower followers to achieve organizational goals and objectives (Yukl, 1999). Leaders who use personalized power have an acute need for power, poison morale, manipulative, and abuse their position of authority to achieve personal goals regardless of the harm inflicted on their subordinates (Padilla et al., 2007; Yukl, 1999). This negative behavior may result from a traumatic childhood that desensitized the leader and created a distorted view of the world. For example, President Bill Clinton's abuse by his alcoholic father may have played a role in his dispassionate performance in the Rwanda genocide deaths (Padilla et al., 2007). Leaders of this mind set use personalized power to create a culture of intimidation.

**Personal charisma.** Charismatic leaders are attractive, have the innate ability to captivate, and influence others to believe in their vision (Sankowsky, 1995). Leaders with the charisma characteristic are persuasive and build trust with followers early in the relationship with the desire to instill loyalty that increases the leader's level of power (Samnani & Singh, 2013). Destructive leaders use charisma to abuse power for personal gain, take credit for others' achievements, and take no accountability for personal mistakes (Yukl, 1999). Scholars have identified two types of charismatic leaders, socialized and personalized (Howell, 2005). The socialized charismatic leader serves others before themselves, and the personalized charismatic leader establishes follower alliance and loyalty early in the leader-follower relationship to

manipulate for personal gain (Howell, 1988; Howell & Shamir, 2005). As a result, followers conform out of obedience and comply with the leader agenda to create unity of the group. Some subordinates may not conform, creating an in-group versus out-group dynamic.

According to the leader-member exchange model, the in-group is composed of the inner circle of employees who have a close relationship with the destructive leader (Graen, 1976). The subordinates in the out-group who tend to disagree with the leader are likely to experience anxiety, anger, and stress (Samnani & Singh, 2013). The negative emotions may have damaging implications for the out-group employee's long-term performance. The in-group members invariably support the charismatic leader and tend to be oblivious to the destructive leadership behavior (Pelletier, 2012).

**The dark triad of personalities.** Personality-leadership relationships have emphasized the need to understand the motives and values of leaders as well as other traits from the psychological construct (Harms, Spain, & Hannah, 2011). Studies conducted on the dark side of leadership emphasize that a leader with these character flaws has the dispositional tendency to engage in destructive leadership behaviors (Harms et al., 2011; Krasikova et al., 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The dark triad of personalities describes leaders who are narcissistic, Machiavellian, or have a psychopathic personality (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Studies describe these traits as behavioral, verbal, and non-verbal manifestations that create an environment of social and psychological stressors for subordinates (Schaubroeck et al., 2007). These personality types use coercive power to manipulate and force followers to achieve their goals (French & Raven, 1959). The dark triad traits are interrelated, but each personality disorder has unique traits that adversely affect workplace outcomes (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012).

***Narcissisism.*** Individuals with a narcissistic personality are self-absorbed and have an inflated sense of entitlement that may lead to abuses of power, focus on achieving their personal goals, and disregard others in pursuit for success (Krasikova et al., 2013; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Narcissistic leaders demand respect from others and in pursuit of personal goals; they will exploit personal and professional relationships. This type of behavior places followers at great risk for experiencing abusive supervision because of the leader's motivation for individual achievement (Glad, 2002; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006).

***Machiavellianism.*** Machiavellian leaders demonstrate high levels of manipulation and use persuasion to exploit followers to achieve their personal goals and objectives (Christie & Geis, 1970; Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010). Individuals with the Machiavellian personality have high intelligence and low levels of emotional intelligence. Their lack of concern for people makes it easy for them to dismiss the needs of subordinates and use people as tools for personal gain (Boddy, 2010).

***Psychopathic personality.*** The leaders with a psychopathic personality use threats, manipulation, and aggressive persuasion to achieve personal goals. Their inability to show empathy and remorse for their destructive behaviors makes it easy for them to ignore the feelings of others and exploit them for personal gain (Boddy, 2010; Krasikova et al., 2013).

### **Destructive Leadership Behaviors**

Destructive leadership does not imply a leader is incompetent or lacks motivation; rather it connects the leader's choice to engage in destructive behavior with the intent to harm subordinates and the organization according to extant research on destructive leadership behavior (Einarsen, 2007; Krasikova et al., 2013). Evidence of this is on the rise. Reports indicate that approximately 40%-50% of employees in U.S. workplaces have experienced victimization in the

form of workplace aggression over a period of two years (Samnami & Singh 2013). Workplace victimization is a term that encapsulates a number of researched areas of non-physical workplace mistreatment to include abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007), petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), and workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000).

**Abusive supervision.** Tepper (2007) defined abusive supervision as, “a subordinates perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (p. 264). In this context, the identified sole perpetrator is the supervisor. Supervisors who have abusive tendencies were victims of destructive leadership (Aryee et al., 2007; Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Tepper, 2007). The negative experience led to the mistreatment of their subordinates by belittling or humiliating them in a public forum, use of disparaging language, intimidating individuals, and withholding information for personal gain (Keashly, 1997; Tepper, 2000). The victims of abusive supervisors are perceived as being meek, passive, submissive, different from others, and high performers.

When they work for an abusive supervisor, they experience psychological distress (diminished self-esteem, depression, disruption in their personal lives), low job satisfaction, and a diminished commitment to the organization (Tepper, 2007). Another destructive construct that has piqued the interest of scholars is petty tyranny.

**Petty tyranny.** Similar to the abusive supervision, tyrannical leaders mistreat subordinates. According to Ashforth (1994), “tyrannical superiors use power oppressively, capriciously, and perhaps vindictively (p. 126).” They have little regard for the follower, but conduct themselves in a manner that supports the organizational goals and objectives. To ensure they achieve success in the organization, they will use hostile acts such as humiliation,



manipulation, and intimidation with subordinates to achieve success (Ashforth, 1994; Tepper, 2000).

**Workplace bullying.** In Europe, researchers have studied bullying in the workplace since the late 1980s and in the 1990s; it was an epidemic in the working environment. Einarsen (2000) defined workplace bullying as, “situations where a person repeatedly and over a period of time is exposed to negative acts (i.e. constant abused, offensive remarks, or teasing, ridicule or social exclusion) on the part of co-workers, supervisors, or subordinates” (p. 197). A study found that 75% of bullying occurred between a leader and the follower, not between colleagues (Tepper, 2007). Experts in the bullying domain believe this statistic is high due to the power imbalance in the working environment (Hershcovis, 2011). There are theories that suggest bullying behavior is a result of a person’s character, and when evident in childhood, it will exist in adulthood. (Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley, & Harvey, 2007). The behavior of a bully uses controlled and regulated emotional outbursts purposely designed to manipulate and influence subordinates by defensive or assertive behaviors.

The theory of bullying is that the supervisor has a personal agenda and will abuse others to achieve personal success. Researchers indicate that victims of bullies are introverts, non-confrontational, exhibit low self-esteem, and overachievers (Matthiesem & Einarsen, 2001). Bullying has negative consequences that directly affect job satisfaction, a person’s health, and workplace attendance. Constructs described are destructive because of the deleterious impact on the workforce. The next section, presents the consequences of destructive behavior in detail.

### **Consequences of Destructive Leadership Behavior**

The healthy leader-follower relationship relies on trust, respect, competency, and commitment to the organization. The leader has the power to influence and shape the employee’s

job experience and commitment to the organization. Destructive leaders use coercive power to manipulate for personal gain and employ fear as a motivator. When the leader creates a hostile work place, it results in negative consequences that trickle down and create a stressful environment that adversely affects the subordinate's professional and personal life (Aryee et al., 2007). Stress is a problem that costs many organizations worldwide billions of dollars in disability claims, lost productivity, absenteeism, and turnover (Xie & Schaubroek, 2001). According to the stressor-stress-strain model the connection between destructive behaviors begets negative consequences (Barling, 1996; Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Employees exposed to destructive behaviors from a supervisor will experience stress and strain. A stressor is a characteristic of the environment that imposes upon the perceptual and cognitive processes of individuals. Stress reflects what the individual experiences and appears in their consciousness. Strain is an individual's physiological and psychological response to stress (Eden, 1982; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964).

Consistent with prior research, destructive leadership adversely affects employees' commitment, turnover intent, job satisfaction, physical and emotional wellbeing, and work performance (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Tepper, 2007). In a quantitative study, there were three types of perpetrators (supervisor, co-worker, and external party) identified and associated with destructive behavior (Hershcovis et al., 2010). The study found that because of a supervisor's formal position of power, they had the strongest negative effects on the subordinates' attitudes and behaviors (Hershcovis et al., 2010). When leaders use power to control subordinates, research indicates they may experience negative psychological consequences such as perceived work-family conflict, psychological distress (Richman, Flaherty, Rospenda, & Christensen, 1992), and increased levels of emotional exhaustion (Tepper, 2000).

Given the possible retribution and ridicule an employee may encounter if they confronted the destructive leader, many are reluctant to report the behavior and find ways to coexist with the leader by incorporating certain coping tools.

A victim of destructive leadership may willingly engage in workplace and supervisor deviance as a result of being negatively affected by the destructive behaviors. Those who participate in workplace deviance purposefully exploit the organizational norms to create dysfunction and chaos (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Supervisor deviance is a result of subordinates who experienced injustices and were threaten by the destructive leader (Robinson et al., 1995). Deviance is demonstrated through retaliation, a behavior that punishes the wrong doer for the harm they caused the victim (Skarlicki & Folger, 2004). Albeit, deviance is one form of coping with a destructive leader, but this approach incorporates a negative to cancel out a negative. Another approach to coping with a destructive leader is through flattery and positive affect.

Researchers identified two types of positive coping mechanisms followers to use in abusive environments. Flattery is one type of coping technique used to increase acceptance by the supervisor. They also cope through conformity and performance of favors to foster good relations (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). Another coping tool is positive affect that involves creating an overall sense of wellbeing and a positive perception of the destructive leader. Positive affects is defined as the “tendency to have an overall sense of well-being, to experience positive emotions and see oneself as pleasurable engaged in terms of both interpersonal relations and achievement” (Baron & Neuman, 1996). Subordinates with a high level of positive effects are more effective with ingratiation and better equipped to block the negative effects created by the destructive leader, but employees with low positive effects were adversely affected by the

abusive behavior. In summary, the study found that the two coping techniques, positive effects, and ingratiation worked favorably for the subordinate because it provided a form of insulation blocking the negative influence associated with destructive leadership behaviors.

The foregoing discussion described one of three key components of the toxic triangle, the destructive leader. The next section describes the susceptible follower component.

### **Followers and Followership**

There is a paucity of research on followers and followership compared to the myriad of studies on leadership, but scholars have found that the follower role is a central crucial component in the leadership process (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). According to Kelley (1992), followers contribute to about 80% to the success of an organization. In a recent literature review, several scholars analyzed the historical studies of research on the treatment of followers and the emerging theory of followership. The ideology on the treatment of followers has evolved from the initial leader-centric theories of Taylorism where managers are superior and followers as inferior (Taylor, 1911, 1934). In the follower-centric approach, the leader's level of influence is reliant on the followers' motivation. Finally, the relational views describe the interdependence of the leader and follower relationship. There are a number of relational approaches such as the importance of balanced power in a leader follower relationship for team success; the leader member exchange theory; and the toxic triangle model where the role of the follower contributes to the destructive leader's success (Follett, 1949; Graen, 1976; Padilla et al., 2007).

The emerging theory of followership studies "the nature and impact of followers and following in the leadership process" (Uhl-Bien et al., p. 89, 2014). Based on this theory, there are two views of followership, the role based approach and the constructivists approach. The role-

based theory views followership as a position, and the followers' interaction with leaders is determined by the follower's traits, characteristics, behaviors, and how they contribute and influence leadership (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Shamir, 2007). Through the years, several scholars have contributed to the role theory approach.

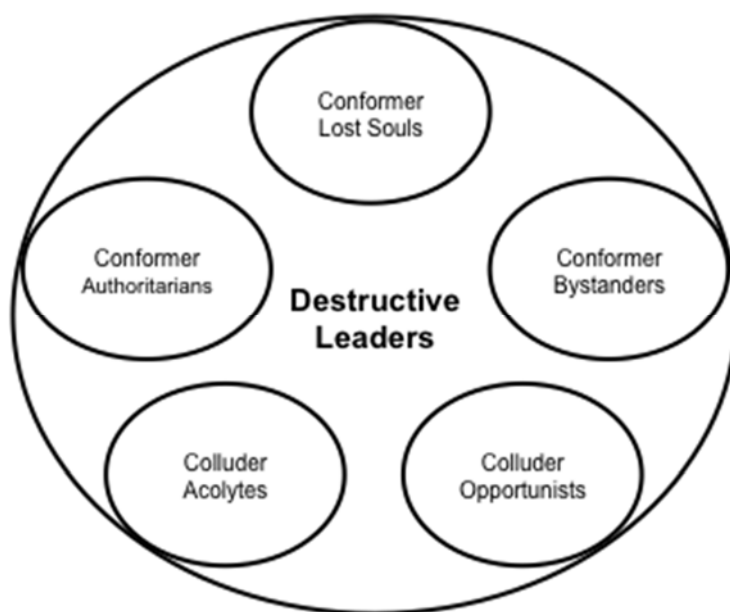
The role-based behaviors of followers are described as those who demonstrate obedience and subordination (Barnard, 1938; Taylor, 1947); are proactive (Grant & Ashford, 2008); use influence tactics (Ansari & Kapoor, 1987); and are resistant (constructive and dysfunctional) (Tepper et al., 2001; Tepper et al., 2006). The role-based views of followership strive to understand the instrumental effects of a follower's characteristics and behaviors and how they shape the outcomes of leadership and the organization. A followers characteristics include but are not limited to Kelley's (1992) exemplary and conformist followers; Chaleff's (2009) courageous follower who provides constructive feedback and has integrity; and Kellerman's (2008) bystanders, participant, and activist. The constructivist approach of followership views the leadership and followership relationship as a co-created social process of reciprocity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Shamir, 2007). The leader and follower relationship is dynamic in this approach and the roles of responsibility may be reversed to achieve organizational success.

In summary, the treatment of the follower has evolved from the leader-centric approach where followers were controlled, and it progressed to the relational views that recognize the leader-follower relationship. As previously mentioned, the leader-follower relationship is key to the success of destructive leadership (Padilla et al., 2007).

**Susceptible followers.** The destructive leadership behavior has been successful because of the support by susceptible followers (Padilla et al., 2007). In earlier studies, susceptible

followers were deficient in self-concept characteristics, and others were confident and supported the leader standards (Weierter, 1997). The toxic triangle model combined the previous research of susceptible followers and placed these followers into two groups, conformers and colluders. The conformer is passive and fears the leader, and the colluder supports the destructive leader for personal gain. In addition, the susceptible circle taxonomy that evolved from the work of Kellerman (2004) described two types of followers, the bystanders who indirectly support bad leadership, and the acolytes who directly participate in the destructive activity. The proposed taxonomy, the susceptible followers circle (see Figure 2), examined five subtypes to the conformer and colluder followers. The conformer subtypes include lost souls, authoritarians, and bystanders; and colluder types include acolytes and opportunists (Thoroughgood et al., 2012).

*Figure 2.*



*Figure 2.* The susceptible circle: element followers associated with destructive leadership. From “The Susceptible Circle: A Taxonomy of Followers Associated With Destructive Leadership,” by Thoroughgood, C. N., Padilla, A., Hunter, S. T., & Tate, B. W., 2012, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 23, 902. Copyright 2012 by Elsevier Limited. Reprinted with permission.

The characteristics of the conformers are those who abide by the leader's demands and are predisposed to being a victim. The lost souls are susceptible to destructive leaders because they rely on the leader to fulfill their basic needs. According to Maslow (1954), when the basic needs of an individual are met, they will be able to attain higher goals. Typically, a charismatic leader will fulfill a follower's basic needs. The lost soul's vulnerability is associated with chronic suffering, distorted self-image, and external locus of control (Rotter, 1966) and immature moral development (Freud, 1921).

The second conformer subtype, authoritarian, is obedient to those who hold a legitimate position of power and function in an environment with rules and order and blindly trusts and obeys those in power, even when the leader is destructive. The final conformer subtype, the bystander, includes individuals who are passive and submit out of fear. They have a negative self-image, are concerned about others' opinions, tend to be introverted, and lack courageous followership disposition (Chaleff, 2009).

In contrast, colluders are ambitious, egocentric, and comply with the destructive leader's goals. They will build an alliance with the destructive leader to exploit the relationship for personal gain (Padilla et al., 2007). The opportunistic subtype is highly ambitious in achieving a position of power. They tend to portray some personality characteristics of Machiavellianism (Padilla et al., 2007). The acolyte subtype is self-motivated to pursue toxic goals and comply with the leaders who have a mutual set of goals.

The question commonly asked by scholars, "why are certain followers vulnerable to destructive leaders?" (Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2005) According to Barbuto's (2000), cross-disciplinary theory, a follower's compliance is determined by influence triggers fabricated by the subordinate's perception of the leader's behavior. The three types of influence triggers are

power-derived, relations-derived, and value-derived. The power-derived trigger is leader-centric where leaders use social power to influence a follower through manipulation, reward systems, role expectancy, expertise, and a follower's loyalty to the leader (French & Raven 1959; Barbuto, 2000). The relations-driven triggers are attributed to external and peer pressures such as public opinion of work and the need for acceptance by the team or group (Barbuto & Scholl, 1998; Ashford & Mael, 1989). The third trigger, values-derived is influenced by our own personal value system. In addition to the triggers, it is the followers' personal characteristics that make them susceptible to being victims of destructive leader behaviors. The victims of bullying are conscientious, literal minded, introverted, over achievers, and most often higher performers (Matthiesem & Einarsen, 2001; Tepper, 2007).

### **Conducive Environment**

The focus of this study is on the susceptible follower component, but it is important to recognize how the environment enables a leader's toxic behavior, the third element in the toxic triangle. An unstable environment where followers fear imminent danger, experience dysfunction in cultural values, and observe that there is no accountability is an ideal setting for destructive leadership (Padilla et al., 2007). When there is instability in the organization and an imbalance of power, the destructive leader has the ability to undermine the institution's values and culture. The culture of the organization is only as strong as the followers and stakeholders. When the organizational culture is weak or it condones destructive behavior, then the leader has more discretion to engage in destructive leadership (Krasikova et al., 2013; Padilla et al., 2007). Conducive environments contribute to the materialization of destructive leader behavior, but it is difficult for this behavior to survive when an organization is healthy and institutes checks and balances for power and control (Padilla et al., 2007). In summary, the toxic triangle concept



brilliantly supports that fact that a destructive leader is successful when there are susceptible followers and the organizational environment enables the destructive behavior.

### **Summary**

Scholars have seen the study of leadership grow exponentially through the years. The early theories of leadership are the foundation of the modern theories and continue to be of great interest in the field including the trait and leader-follower exchange theories (Dihn et al., 2014). In all these theories the essence of leadership, is the ability to influence the behavior and actions of followers and affect the organizations through decisions and strategies (Barnard 1938; Dihn et al., 2014). Throughout a person's career, he or she may work for, at any given time, a constructive or destructive leader. Constructive leaders have a positive impact because they empower and inspire followers to achieve goals, promote empowerment, and create an environment of trust and openness. The destructive leaders negatively affect followers through fear, instill passive aggression, and create a hostile workplace.

The role of the follower has evolved from the early leader-centric theories to the relational approach. Followers are the key component to a constructive and destructive leaders success. Quantitative studies have identified two types of susceptible followers; a conformer and a colluder. Future research needs to devote more attention to examining the role of the susceptible follower, specifically the members of the Millennial generation because of their willingness to please others and their tendency toward blind obedience. Destructive leadership behavior is also a serious problem for organizations.

Organizations and organizational outsiders pay a heavy price for destructive leadership behaviors (Bedeian & Hunt, 1998; Kellerman, 2004). Today U.S. companies are spending an estimated \$23 billion annually on healthcare costs (e.g. chronic absenteeism, high turnover, and

dissatisfaction) resulting from the negative impacts of destructive leaders (Tepper et al., 2006).

Organizational outsiders will continue to pay a higher price for goods and services because of the consequences of destructive leadership. In the service sector (business in finance, information technology, consulting firms, real estate, insurance, hospitality, and health care) destructive leaders are detrimental to the success of the organization because the industry relies on relationships with employees and customers.

The literature review strongly supports the assertion that destructive leaders create havoc in the work environment and cost companies billions but with the understanding that the research of this topic is incomplete and the field of research is fragmented. This study addressed the qualitative gap by conducting an interpretive study with those of the Millennial generation who work for a destructive leader in a service organization.

In chapter 3, I discuss the methodology for the study. I selected an interpretive qualitative research design for my dissertation to learn about the participants experiences and how they made sense of it.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

Qualitative research is an approach used to understand and learn how participants make sense of their lived experiences. The goal of my dissertation is to answer the two research questions related to participant perceptions of destructive behavior and how it influenced their lives. In this chapter, I describe the selected research approach and design, how the participants were selected for the study and personal biographies, the data collection procedure, the analysis and interpretation, the role of the researcher, and the efforts used to ensure trustworthiness and credibility in the study.

#### **Research Approach**

The study embraces the philosophical worldview social constructivism paradigm to interpret the meanings from the participants' experiences. The constructivist paradigm supports the interpretive design where the researcher describes the individuals' lived experiences through the participants' point of view (Merriam, 2002). This paradigm was selected to build an understanding of meaning behind a participants constructed realities, face-to-face interaction between the researcher and respondents, and rich description (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The constructivist view shaped the research approach and design used for the study.

The qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study because it was the best approach to conduct research in a natural setting and answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014). The research incorporated three basic tenets of qualitative inquiry as a guide in the study: (1) the researcher matters; (2) the inquiry into meaning is in service of understanding; and (3) qualitative inquiry embraces new ways of looking at the world (Shank, 2006, p. 10).

The qualitative approach used an insightful planned inquiry that provided the followers with an opportunity to candidly recount their lived experiences through the interview (Creswell, 2014; Holliday, 2007; Shank, 2006).

### **Research Design**

The interpretive research design models the phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Phenomenology emphasizes the essence of the experience, and symbolic interaction focuses on the interpretation of people within a society (Merriam, 2002). The interpretive qualitative method was appropriate for this study because it emphasized the participant's interpretations and perceptions based on their experiences and worldviews. The role of the researcher was not to devise, but to interpret the meaning of how human beings make sense of the world and present the findings (Merriam, 2002). In this study, I explored and sought to understand how Millennial followers made sense of their lived experiences when they worked for destructive leaders.

### **Research Questions**

The interpretive study explored the consequences of destructive leadership from the follower's lived experiences and, as a result, answered the two research questions.

1. What were the followers' lived experiences when working for leaders perceived as destructive?
2. How did destructive behaviors affect the personal and professional lives of the followers?

### **Selection of Participants**

For the purpose of the study it was critical to intentionally select the participants and who met the selection demographic criterion.

- a. Born between 1976 and 1985
- b. Completed a four year degree
- c. Employed fulltime four years or more
- d. Worked for two or more supervisors
- e. Worked in a service organization

The study included 10 prescreened participants who worked for one or more different service organizations (see Table 1 for participant selection criteria). Through the primary search for potential participants, eight interviewees were friends, current colleagues, former colleagues, or classmates. In search of additional participants, I used the snowball technique. Snowball technique is a method used to increase the number of participants by asking current interviewees to recommend others for interviewing (Creswell, 2014). Participation for this study was voluntary. Participants received a letter of solicitation in person or by email (see Appendix D). The letter included the purpose of the study, the participant requirements, the approximate length of the interview, and my contact information. Participants indicated their interest in person, text message, or email. Finally, interviews were scheduled, interviews locations identified, and conducted.

### **Interview Setting**

For this study, utilizing an off-site location was critical to the interviewees' participation because of the sensitivity of the topic. I requested that the participant select the place of the interview where they would be most comfortable and that was reasonably quiet to be free from interruptions. The participants selected various locations of their choice to including their homes, educational institutions, and quiet restaurants.

Table 1

*Participant Selection Criteria*

Participant	Age	College Level	Years Employed Fulltime Post College	Type of Service Organization
1	36	Graduate	9	Retail, Manufacturing, Entertainment
2	34	Graduate	9	Military, Insurance, Banking
3	33	Graduate	8	Military, Insurance, Banking
4	32	Graduate	12	Insurance, Banking
5	31	Undergrad	7	Information Technology
6	30	Graduate	8	Non-Profit, Oil & Gas, Healthcare
7	35	Graduate	13	Public Service, Military, Insurance, Banking
8	34	Graduate	13	Military, Banking
9	30	Graduate	9	Insurance, Banking
10	30	Graduate	11	Non-Profit, Insurance

**Research Instrument**

In qualitative studies, the role of the researcher is to be the key instrument in collecting data through interviews, reviewing documents, and observing participants (Creswell, 2014). As the interviewer, it is important to build rapport and trust with the participant before the interview. To establish rapport, I used an icebreaker and small talk before the start of the interview. During the interview, it was important to be flexible, objective, and be a good listener to achieve optimal results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The interviews were face-to-face and guided by a semi-structured format with open-ended questions (see Appendix E). Before conducting the

interviews, I selected three experts in the qualitative field to review the questions to check for validity.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

This study was conducted under the guidance of a dissertation committee at the University of the Incarnate Word, specifically the Doctoral program at the Dreeben School of Education.

As a Doctoral candidate I, the researcher, worked with experienced professionals on the committee and conducted the research in an appropriate manner that ensured the process of evaluation and assessment was conducted accurately and ethically.

In preparation for the study, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative certification (see Appendix B); received approval from the University of the Incarnate Word Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A); and developed and applied a study consent form (see Appendix C). The consent form included the following assurances: (a) all information is held in strict confidence, (b) participation is voluntary, (c) participants have the choice to withdraw from the study at any time without harm or penalty, and (d) there are no physical risks related to those who participated in the study.

Before the research study, the participants read the consent form, and I answered any questions before they signed the form. I maintained the confidentiality and privacy of all participants and used pseudonyms to ensure their identities remained anonymous. A professional service transcribed the digitally recorded interviews, and the identities of the participants remained unknown. For my records, I obtained a signed copy of the consent forms, the digitally recorded interviews, and the transcripts. These items remained in my possession or were securely locked in a desk drawer. The recorded interviews were pass code protected.

## **Data Collection and Procedure**

In the interpretive methodology, various approaches are available to collect and analyze data. This study applied the approach developed by Giorgi (1997). This process involves five qualitative steps: (1) collecting verbal data; (2) reading of the data; (3) breaking data down into codes; (4) organizing the data and generating themes; and (5) synthesize and summarize the data (p.9).

**Participant interviews.** In this study, the primary data collection method was to conduct in-depth individual interviews with the participant.

The entire interview process occurred over a two-month period. The interview was an active interaction between both the interviewer and interviewee, who together engaged in a conversation with a common purpose (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The purpose for the interviews in this study was to hear the participant's stories in their own words as they described their experiences working for a destructive leader.

In preparation for the interviews, I developed a list of semi-structured questions (see Appendix E) to guide the facilitation of the conversation with the interviewee. The questions were open-ended and written with flexibility in mind to encourage the participant to talk freely and gain insight into their experiences. I scheduled each interview at a time convenient for the participant and each interview lasted approximately one hour. Each participant received an email, text, or voicemail reminder the day before the interview.

**Collecting verbal data.** At the start of the interviews, I established a rapport with the participants. This was especially important with the two participants referred by a colleague or friend. I spoke with them over the phone to develop rapport before the scheduled interview. I



reviewed the expectations of the interview, explained the consent process, and gave them time to ask any questions before the interview started. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

All participants approved the use of the digital recorder for the interviews to ensure accuracy of the dialogue. The interview process began with predetermined structured questions to validate the participant's understanding of the required demographics and an understanding of the definitions of destructive leader and the consequences related to destructive leadership as defined in the research. To begin discussion of the semi-structured questions, I asked the participant to share his or her work experiences after college graduation. I asked clarifying questions to develop a deeper understanding of their overall professional experiences.

The interviewee was encouraged to provide detailed answers, but there were times when I probed the participant to provide more interesting and important facts (e.g. "Tell me how the boss manipulated you?", "Explain what you experienced when you were manipulated?" and "How did it affect you?"). In addition to listening to the interviewee, I was acutely aware of their non-verbal communication cues (attitude, emotions, and facial expressions) when they responded to the interview questions. For example, I noticed apprehension, hesitations, fluctuation in their voice, and fidgeting.

When the participant had no further examples or experiences to share, I concluded the interview and thanked them for their time. Immediately after the interview, I digitally recorded field notes to reflect on the event and made notes of key concepts unique to the interview. I sent all 10 of the recorded interviews to a third party professional service for transcription. When I had concluded the 10th interview, I noticed saturation had occurred because of the repetition in the patterns of data. Saturation has occurred when there is a redundancy of categories and themes in the collected data (Creswell, 2014).

## **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The data collection for my research evolved over a two-month period. In addition to Giorgi's approach, I employed Creswell's (2014) six-point method of data analysis to add rigor to the analysis. The six points included (1) organize and prepare the collected data for analysis; (2) read all the data and record thoughts; (3) code the data and develop a qualitative codebook; (4) identify categories/themes from the coding; (5) decide how the themes will be presented; and (6) interpret the findings (pp. 197-200).

**Organize and read the data.** The interview recordings were validated for accuracy through the exercise of listening to every audio-recorded interview while reading the transcription line by line to ensure correctness. This technique also helped to conceptualize the events that had taken place during the interview including the voice of the participant and non-verbal cues when responding to the questions. I read and re-read the entire transcribed interview of each participant to develop an overall understanding of the participants' experience before analyses. As I read the transcriptions, I underlined key phrases, noted my reflections, identified any gaps of information, and reduced data that was insignificant to the study. I used the software NVivo to code and categorize the raw data.

**Coding of the data.** As I conducted the coding exercise, the intent was to develop the analysis inductively and delineate the meanings of each of the participants to ensure their stories were heard. I assigned codes to participant statements that related to the research questions. Throughout the coding process, I looked for comparisons, similarities, patterns, and discrepancies in the data (Dierckx de Casterle, Gastmans, Bryon, & Denier, 2012). When I discovered new codes in an interview, I went back and checked for their presence in previous interviews. This iterative analysis occurred four times for each transcription to reduce, sort, and

rank the data in the qualitative codebook (see Appendix F). According to Creswell (2014), the codebook is a living document that captures the list of codes, abbreviations, and definitions of the codes. In analyzing the data in the codebook, higher order categories emerged.

**Categories and themes.** I identified three categories through the coding exercise, which helped build the themes. There were four categories that emerged in this study, including (1) leaders destructive behaviors, (2) followers experience in the work environment, (3) the personal impact from the bad behavior, and personal leadership awareness (see Table 2 for category characteristics).

Table 2

*Category Characteristics*

#	Categories	Characteristics
1	Leaders destructive behaviors	Unethical, coercion, condescending, undermining, ignores feedback, personal ambition, no consequences
2	Experience in environment	Poisoned morale, demeaning, public humiliation, devalued, distrust, dysfunctional/chaos
3	Personal impact	Lowered engagement, stressed, depressed, avoidance, negative impact, crying, lack of enjoyment, Sunday night blues, fear of losing job, anxiety, actively looking for other opportunities
4	Personal leadership awareness	Learned from bad leaders, compassionate, servant leader, situational leader, build trust, golden rule, no verbal abuse

Through analysis of the categories, four themes emerged: (1) insidious behaviors that were experienced by followers, (2) follower's experience in a toxic work environment, (3) follower's personal impact and reactions to the destructive behaviors, and (4) follower's personal leadership style influenced by experiences (see Table 3 for theme characteristics). Tables 3 and 4 are examples of how I organized the data. Vigilance was used to validate the data through

crosschecking (between the codes to categories, and categories to themes, and themes to research questions) to verify the themes that derived from the analysis. As the researcher, I dedicated much time to analyzing the themes and ensure the participant's stories were accurate and applied to my study.

Table 3

*Theme Characteristics*

#	Themes	Characteristics
1	Insidious behaviors that were described by the followers	Micro-management, coercion, condescendence, failure to listen, use of manipulation for personal gain, unethical decisions, undermined subordinates, and no consequences.
2	Followers experience in a toxic work environment	Follower as the individual: devalued, distrust leader, impacted quality of work, and public humiliation. Follower as bystander: poisoned morale, high turnover, and dysfunction/chaos.
3	Followers personal impact and reactions to the destructive behaviors	Psychological: emotional/mental exhaustion, no work/life balance, impact to credibility. Reaction: lowered engagement, avoidance, and/or resignation.
4	Followers personal leadership style influenced by Experiences	Product of environment, compassionate, open and understanding, build trust, no verbal abuse, consider others feeling, and self-awareness.

### Synthesis and Summarizing of Data

My goal in this research effort was to discover how the participants interpreted the leader's destructive behavior through their lived experiences. When I sorted through the transcripts I identified key phrases and divided the data into three categories to which the four themes emerged answering the two research questions. When interpreting the data, I maintained awareness of the theoretical framework, the toxic triangle. In particular, I focused on the susceptible follower component and how the participants' stories contributed to published literature. It became evident through the analysis that all participants are conformers and bystanders. For example, the participants mentioned how they performed unethical acts out of

fear and experienced diminished self-esteem. Additionally, they were impacted psychologically, and in all cases they took some form of action that helped them cope in the toxic work environment while working for a destructive leader. The findings in chapter four describe the diverse quotations from the participants' stories to support each theme.

### **Role of the Qualitative Researcher**

My passion for the research in destructive leadership developed from personal experiences with bad leaders early in my professional career. As a follower, I noticed the simplest of tasks became increasingly more difficult; I was emotionally exhausted and began to feel physically ill. This was the result of working in a toxic environment where employees were verbally abused; spiteful gossip destroyed teams and poisoned morale. I felt like I worked in a combat zone Monday through Friday and was physically exhausted on the weekends. When pursuing my graduate degree I stumbled on a book titled, *Coping with Toxic Managers, Subordinates, and Other Difficult People* (Lubit, 2004). Little did I know, five years later I would conduct a study of my own on destructive leaders. Through my experiences, I have developed a passion to help those adversely impacted by destructive leaders.

As a qualitative researcher, I am the primary instrument to collect and analyze data. The advantages of a human instrument are the immediate feedback and the ability to add depth and breadth to the study through both verbal and nonverbal communications. The limitation with the researcher being the instrument is their biases may influence the findings in the study. To minimize the biases, a researcher should be open and up front about their experiences that may influence the study. According to Peshkin (1988), "ones subjectivities can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, on that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they collected" (p18).

I employed an active and systematic reflective process to evaluate my personal subjectivity and biases through a personal reflective journal. I consciously sought biases before, during, and after the research process, remained mindful of my weaknesses as a researcher and how this could influence my study and results.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Trustworthiness is critical in narrative research, and I made every effort to represent the authenticity of the participant's experiences as accurately as possible and incorporated steps to enhance rigor of the research (Moss, 2004). In my qualitative study, trustworthiness of the findings was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Arguably, credibility is the most important facet in establishing trustworthiness because it emphasizes how the findings line up with reality (Lincoln & Guba 2000; Merriam, 2002). In this study, the validation of credibility occurred through triangulation, and member checking. Transferability emphasizes the degree in which the findings can be transferred to other situations and populations (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Merriam, 2002). It will be established when the detailed documentation of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the study are applied to similar situation under similar circumstances. Dependability provides the reader with an understanding of the techniques and methods used to collect and analyze the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This exists in the audit trail that included the original transcripts from the interviews, a qualitative codebook, and member checks. Confirmability is concerned with the steps taken to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the participant's stories (Sheton, 2003).

**Triangulation.** The triangulation process involved the convergence of three different source methods interviews, document analysis, and observations. The interviews were my primary data gathering method. Field observation occurred during the interviews where I

observed the participants nonverbal cues during the discussion. The review of the documents was separate from the interview locations, and I read the collected data four times before coding and analyzing the data.

**Member checking.** Member checking can take place during the interviews or at the end of data collection. To ensure the credibility and accuracy of the data, I checked the transcripts for errors, verified that the definitions of codes matched the meaning throughout, and contacted the participant for clarification and followed up when necessary (Creswell, 2014; Shank, 2006). The participants received a copy of their individual interview transcript in addition to my interpretations. I requested they comment and approve on the validity and accuracy of my interpretations.

## **Summary**

This chapter described the research design used to collect and inductively analyze the data to identify codes, categories, and themes. My role as the researcher was the key instrument in collection of data for the study and to ensure protection of participants. I was vigilant to ensure the participants identity; stories were not compromised through anonymity and by securing the digital and written transcriptions in a locked safe.

The next chapter presents a discussion of the analysis and interpretation of data. The data in Chapter 4 contains the personal interviews and the themes that derived from the analysis.

## Chapter IV: Findings

This chapter uncovered the participants' lived experiences when they worked for a leader perceived as destructive and how it affected them personally and professionally. The study used the toxic triangle theoretical framework, specifically the susceptible follower component to frame the meaning and understanding of the study. The data collection was through personal interviews with participants purposefully selected for the study. As the researcher, I invited 10 participants to take part in this study and be interviewed to obtain information about their experiences (see Table 4 for participants demographic characteristics) followed by a summary of the participant's profile.

Table 4

### *Participants Demographic Characteristics*

Participant ID	Age	Gender	College Level	Years Employed Fulltime	Number of Supervisors	Type of Service Organization
P1	36	Female	Post Graduate	9	4	Retail, Manufacturing, Entertainment
P2	34	Male	Graduate	9	3	Military, Insurance, Banking
P3	33	Male	Graduate	8	3	Military, Insurance, Banking
P4	32	Female	Graduate	12	4	Insurance, Banking
P5	31	Male	Undergrad	7	3	Information Technology
P6	30	Female	Graduate	8	2	Non-Profit, Oil & Gas, Healthcare
P7	35	Male	Graduate	13	5	Electric Co., Military, Insurance
P8	34	Female	Graduate	13	4	Military, Banking
P9	30	Female	Post Graduate	9	4	Insurance, Banking
P10	30	Female	Graduate	11	3	Non-Profit, Insurance

*Note.* The table shows the participant identifier as P1 for participant 1.



## **Participant's Profiles**

P1 is a 36-year-old female with a doctoral degree and is a human resource professional in the entertainment industry. After graduating from college as an undergraduate with a degree in human resource management, she started her career in retail where she first encountered a leader who demonstrated destructive behaviors. After two years in retail, she took a job in the manufacturing industry for five years. In an effort to pursue job growth, she accepted a human resource position in the entertainment industry.

P2 is a 34-year-old male who has worked in three service industries including the military, insurance, and banking. He holds a graduate degree in business administration and is a director in the insurance and banking industry. His initial exposure to a destructive leader was as a young officer in the military. After four years of military service, he discontinued his career because of his experience with the destructive boss. Following his military career, he transitioned into a civilian job and now works in the insurance and banking industry.

P3 is a 33-year-old male who is a director with a graduate degree in business administration. His career started in the military as an officer where he worked for a destructive boss. When he completed his service commitment, he sought out opportunities outside the military. He started his civilian career in the insurance and banking industry as a project manager where he encountered another destructive leader.

P4 is a 32-year-old female who works in insurance and banking as a manager. She holds a graduate degree in business administration. She currently works for a destructive leader and it has affected her personally and professionally.

P5 is a 31-year-old male with an undergraduate degree in engineering. He works for an engineering firm, and in his line of work he has worked for two destructive leaders. The toxic environment has affected his career, and he is in the process of starting his own business.

P6 is a 30-year-old female who holds a graduate degree and has worked in the oil and gas industry at a non-profit. During her time in the oil and gas company, she worked for destructive leader who prompted her to resign because it affected her professional and personal life.

P7 is a 35-year-old male who hold a graduate degree in business administration. His career began in the military, and after completing his commitment, he took a job in public service field where he experienced and witnessed destructive leadership behaviors. After resigning from public service, he took a job in the insurance and banking industry.

P8 is a 34-year-old female who has a graduate degree and served in the military officer corps. Currently she works in the insurance and banking industry and reports to a destructive leader.

P9 is a 30-year-old female with a doctoral degree. Her career started in the insurance and banking industry where she has encountered a few destructive leaders. The first destructive leader affected her career resulting in a career change. In her current position, she works in a department managed by a destructive executive.

P10 is a 30-year-old female with a graduate degree in business. When she worked in a non-profit organization, she experienced a destructive supervisor who prompted her to resign. Most recently, she resigned her position with another bad leader who was unethical.

## **Findings**

I analyzed the collected data multiple times to identify similarities, differences, reduce, and revise the themes for a more accurate representation of the findings. The themes that emerged

from the analysis portray the stories narrated from the followers' perspective. The inductive reasoning supported the interpretation of the data from the personal interviews to answer the two research questions:

1. What were the followers' lived experiences when they worked for leaders perceived as destructive?
2. How did the destructive behavior affect the personal and profession lives of the followers?

**Research question one.** What were the followers' lived experiences when they worked for leaders perceived as destructive?

For the first research question, I analyzed the data that focused on the participants' thoughts and feelings that were captured through the personal interviews. The analysis revealed two noteworthy themes of meaning in response to the first research question (see Table 5 themes for question one):

1. Insidious behaviors that were described by the followers; and
2. The followers experience in a toxic work environment

Table 5

*What Were the Followers' Lived Experiences When They Worked for Leaders Perceived as Destructive?*

Themes	Characteristics
1. Insidious behaviors that were described by the followers	Micro-management, coercion, condescendence, failure to listen, use of manipulation for personal gain, unethical decisions, undermined subordinates, and no consequences.
2. The followers experience in a toxic work environment	Follower as the individual: devalued, distrust leader, impacted quality of work, and public humiliation. Follower as bystander: poisoned morale, high turnover, and dysfunction/chaos.

***Theme #1: Insidious behaviors that were described by followers.*** The first theme explored the destructive behaviors as described by the followers. To truly appreciate a follower's personal experience, it was important to initially understand the types of destructive behavior they witnessed and the pivotal role it played in the leader-follower relationship. Leaders are in a position to influence and shape the individuals they lead and organizational effectiveness. When a leader is destructive, they generate dysfunction and long-term poisonous effects (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). As the participants described the destructive behaviors, they were quick to respond with detailed examples. During the dialogue, I noticed they were animated and had a tendency to go off on a tangent. I was careful not to interrupt their thoughts, but waited until they completed their thoughts before I interrupted with a few clarifying questions. From the stories, several anti-subordinate destructive behaviors materialized such as micro-management, coercion, condescendence, failure to listen to the follower, use of manipulation for personal gain, unethical decisions, and undermining their subordinates.

Anti-subordinate leaders demonstrate tyrannical and derailed leadership behaviors. Tyrannical leaders undermine subordinates, belittle, manipulate, and use others as scapegoats for personal gain (Ashforth, 1994; Einarsen et al., 2007). Derailed leaders are destructive toward subordinates and the organization when they demonstrate destructive behaviors such as humiliation, intimidation, and betray trust (2007). The following are selected descriptions of the destructive behaviors (micro-management, coercion/condescendence, discounted feedback, undermined followers and unethical acts) explained by followers during the interviews.

*Micro-management.* P1: She was very much a micro manager because she would literally stand over my shoulder and watch me as I entered data into the Human Resource Information System for eight hours.

P3: In my position as a service manager I had to coach and complete metrics on the member service representatives that I supervised. In my view of responsibility, coaching

was more important than measuring the matrix. As a manager, I should have the autonomy to be able to develop my people as long as I am meeting the metrics, but my director only cared about the metrics and not the people. As a result, I was micro managed on my metrics and requested to provide updates on an hourly basis, so I was unable to coach my staff.

P4: My boss told me during a weekly meeting that, “I can’t control you, and I need to control you.” I was in shock when I was told, “I can’t control you.” I am like, you should not be trying to control me and you do not need to control me, we need to be doing the right thing for the company is what we need to be doing. She also requested a daily status on each of my tasks. I felt like this person was playing mind games with me.

*Coercion and condescendence.* P1: I am a human resource specialist for a company in the entertainment industry and have been intimidated by my manager to partake in social events that involved alcohol consumption. When I first started my job she told me that we are required to attend the weekly social event. At this event they serve alcoholic drinks – it starts at 3:30 and goes up to 4:30, but your shift doesn’t end until 5:30 so you consume alcohol and then go back to work. We were highly encouraged by my manager to be very social and go out and have drinks with people in the company, which I am not necessarily comfortable doing. I do not want to be forced to consume alcohol.

In addition to the weekly social events and company games, we are required to attend the annual employee bus trip to another city, which was after hours during the week. When we return it is usually about two o’clock in the morning and we are expected to be at work by eight o’clock. When I am not able to go, the director is very condescending through her body language. She does not say anything to you, but just looks at you with complete disappointment and intimidation. It is hard to explain but it is visual. I definitely felt uncomfortable.

P7: In my position at the manufacturing company I had one destructive manager, who tried to intimidate me during a performance evaluation. After reviewing my performance evaluation, he told me, “well you know, people don’t put comments in the performance evaluation”, to which I responded, “yes they do.” In general, he said, “I was told that management frowns upon employees who put comments into their performance evaluation in response to a manager’s comments”, which was completely not true and I spoke with HR about it.

Coercion is another common trait with destructive leaders, it is kind of the attempt to manipulate the people that work for them or their peers or management.

*Discounted the followers’ feedback.* P1: There have been instances when my manager overlooked a human resource best practice. I tried to communicate the issues with her behind closed doors to avoid embarrassing her, but the manager has the mind-set that, it is going to be done her way because she said so. For example, if I tell her it doesn’t make sense according to best practices, she stops listening completely. She refuses not hear a single thing I say. She says, “We are doing it this way because that is how I said it is going to be done.” She is highly combative when approached about a change.

P2: The executive in the current company I work and he didn't take my advice. In fact, it didn't take advice from anyone. I do remember when working for him I started to only produce what I was responsible for and nothing more because of his incompetence it wasn't worth my extra time and he did not value me.

P6: There was a meeting arranged to talk with the director about her bad behavior. The attendees included her, my boss, and me. In the meeting, she was very combative and stopped listening to anyone and abruptly walked out of the meeting. She always thinks that she is right about everything. She is either hot, or cold. I witnessed several of her peers and employees quit because of her destructive behavior.

P10: There is one instance where I needed to provide feedback to my supervisor about her missing work. Sounds odd, I know. For example, one day she did not come in early in the morning to accomplish an assignment she had three weeks to complete.

I tried to engage her team to see if there was anything that I could do to get the assignment done because I knew that if she did not do her part it was going to create a backlog for the team. When I approached her about missing the assignment I sat down in her office, and I asked "be honest with me and if you need me to protect you I will do my best to do that, but I need to know what is going on." If you keep me in the dark, I cannot help you anymore. She said that she would try, but there was not any effort on her part.

*Manipulate others for personal gain.* P7: I have worked for a couple of destructive leaders who were ambitious people who were most self-serving and more interested in their own career versus their employees and the organization's well-being. In the majority of cases they tended to be kind of more narcissistic, intelligent people who did what they felt was in their own best interest the majority of the time while mostly fulfilling the organization's goals, but in a way they tended to be more harmful to their teams and in the organization's overall good. Definitely affecting morale as well in the end.

These destructive leaders wanted success and used manipulation to achieve results. The other thing that I think that is a common trait, is they normally tend to have very good ability to kind of manage up without sometimes their leadership understanding the dysfunction that manager or that leader causes within their own team. So normally they manage up very well, but not manage down. In each case without fail, there were people who were very good individual contributors each time, but not good managers or leaders in either case. For example, my current boss was recently promoted, again twice in one year because she produced results, but sacrificed the team to do it. The team jokes about there being a revolving door because the burn out rate is so high

P8: My boss is just demanding in a way that is unrealistic. For example, she will request a budget analysis at noon and say it is due by the close of business. Never mind that I have three other project deadlines and an afternoon full of meetings with customers. Often I would consult with my colleagues on a due date, and they would share that it is not due until the following next week. In knowing the actual due date I asked my boss why the sense of urgency, she would name drop. Meaning, she would say it was for the Chief Operating Officer, which come to find out it was not for him, but she felt if she tied the

request to a top executive that I would drop everything. She focuses only on results no matter how it affects her team.

P9: It never fails, the executive will send me an email tasking at 4:00 pm and wants it done by 8:00 pm that evening without any consideration of my time or other projects. When I asked clarifying questions, she was vague in her expectations, but makes it very clear she wants it done now to get the results submitted quickly because it is for the Chief Executive Officer. Come to find out it was not for him, but she used his position to manipulative me into dropping everything and staying last to complete the assignment. When it was completed, it was given to her and she threw it back at me and said, “do it all over again from start to finish because it isn’t what I requested.” Okay well then you should have been more clear when you ask of what it is was that you wanted because that is what you asked for in the first place. There have been many long nights to ensure she looks good in front of her peers and top executives.

P10: The executive I worked for had a bad reputation for missing so many meetings and was not returning phone calls. I remember she missed a high profile assignment and the customer contacted my boss’s supervisor, the senior executive.

Well, my supervisor saved herself and threw one of her employees under the bus, by making them the scapegoat.

*Undermined the followers.* P5: I have been undermined on many occasions from the destructive supervisor. For example, when there is a problem in building a showcase, he puts on a show and panics because he is in over his head. As soon as I walk in to assist, he disappears outside to smoke. He’ll be missing for hours, and when he returns he isn’t happy and throws a temper tantrum. I am called into his office to be yelled at for thirty-five to forty-five minutes for screwing up the project. I know I didn’t make a mistake, but he will undermine my work so he doesn’t appear incompetent in front of his boss. He plays mind games.

P8: My current boss who is flippant about my time. For instance, we were talking at one point about releasing funds from my project, and I said I could have that information at the end of the month. I shared that I needed to chat with my customers and understand the impact to the project when the funds are released. She came to me at the first of the month and she said, “I need those funds released today.” First of all completely unrealistic, even if I was planning to give her money, I mean, a day is not appropriate. I am undermined weekly.

*Unethical.* P7: Something I have noticed when I worked for destructive leaders is that they lack a certain level of self-awareness, but they are able to understand at the same time that there are certain behaviours that are not norms, and so they ride the line between pushing their own negative unethical behaviours and acting in a certain way that may that doesn’t necessarily meet the company’s or the organization’s values.

P10: In my career I worked for two destructive leaders who were definitely unethical. The first destructive leader that I witnessed was destructive in the sense of the definition that they were going against the goals of the organization by not showing up to meetings, lying and saying that they were there when they were not on campus or at the actual location of the company. They did not complete assignments on time and then asked me to hide their mistake by telling others that I had missed an email or submitted the wrong assignment to buy the supervisor more time.

Through the lies, it became much more difficult to cover up for her because she became less and less active in her actual job duties, she wasn't even there to tell me when I needed to cover up for her. Creating the lies for her started to fall apart because I would create one lie and she would create another. For example, she missed a meeting with a very important executive and I told them it was because she had a family emergency and she told them it was because she had been sick all night. To avoid another miscommunication of lies, I was supposed to be as vague as possible with why she was missing the meetings.

To lie on the spot was certainly out of character, I wear my emotions on my sleeve and it was very obvious that I was lying, you know, I look like a deer caught in the headlights. It was literally a comedy of errors.

The second destructive unethical leader was the executive director of a non-profit organization. He was destructive in the sense that he did not want to go along with the organizations mission and goal. He actively worked against them by coming up with these odd ideas to make money for the center, but they were unethical. We found out later that another organization he ran in a different city was now bankrupt and he had driven it into the ground because of unethical money decisions.

*No consequences.* In this final section, followers shared stories about the destructive leaders who were not reprimanded for their bad behavior. In fact, many were rewarded for their achievements and promoted because they produced results and managed up. It was disconcerting to see that none of the toxic leaders referenced in these stories endured consequences for their destructive behaviours.

P1: I have talked to the senior executive about the director's condescending behaviors about how it is affecting morale and creates high turnover. The executive's solution was to request that I work with director to help her be a better manager. I did not know how that was going to work when she will not listen to me and I am her subordinate. Bottom line, she continues to be destructive and no one in upper management has addressed her behavior.

P6: Over a course of two years I had reported the destructive leader to the Human Resources (HR) department. I shared with the HR manager that the director screams at me in front of others, how stressful it was in that role where I was the only girl and the other three were guys. She left the guys alone. The HR manager told me that in the past



year 10 complaints were filed about this director's bad behavior. I was shocked to know about the large number of complaints and that nothing had been done to correct her behavior. I was somewhat disappointed in HR and the company; I always thought the best of the company. I had to deal with her bad behavior for five years. HR was the last straw and forced me to make the decision to leave.

When I resigned, I wrote a letter to the CEO stating why I left the company, and a year later, he replied, "I apologize that you had to leave the company." I am glad I left because right now, I still talk to quite a few people back there that I used to know and they say that they should have left, because things have not changed.

P7: In multiple cases I have witnessed things where that leader displayed more say hostile behaviors at times, yelling, screaming, getting to the point where they were ready to fight a peer over an issue in a foreign country. In my experience, none of the destructive leaders suffered consequences for their abusive actions.

P8: My boss has cause her admin to cry at work because she is not exactly private when she says rude things, I mean, it is out right there for everyone to hear. Does leadership see it as big as a problem as maybe some other people are experiencing it, probably not. The organization is very result driven and she gives results so I think they tolerate some of it. They must because the recently promoted her to a senior executive position.

P9: A few employees in my department filed a grievance with the Human Resource department and the destructive executive was investigated. As part of the investigation, she had to apologize to the team. She said, "I apologize for making the team feel fear, not being comfortable in your work environment, not happy coming to work, not wanting to be in the department anymore, you know, I really apologize." I sat there and I said to myself, wow that takes a lot of guts. Then she says, and this is where it all fell apart for me, she says, "I was completely unaware that I was making people feel that way and I am going to try better to recognize my behavior's." I was shocked to find out the next day senior announced her promotion, really. Talk about salt of a wound. I have lost faith in the system.

### **Summary of Theme One**

The first theme, insidious behaviors experienced by followers, portrayed how the followers interpreted their understanding of the leaders' destructive behaviors. Previous research supports the validity of the behaviors described in the study. The second theme is additional follower insights that illustrate their experiences from an individual's perspective and as a bystander.

**Theme #2: Followers experience in a toxic work environment.** Participants in this study described their experience with the destructive leader behaviors as individuals and what they witnessed when they were bystanders. According to Padilla et al., (2007) there are two types of susceptible followers, the conformer and colluder. The conformers are passive followers and colluders will support toxic leader for personal gain. In addition to the two types of followers there are three sub-elements of followers – bystander, authoritarians, and lost souls (Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Bystanders are passive and controlled by the leader through fear; authoritarians obey those in a position of power; and lost souls usually have exhibit a low self-esteem and rely on leaders for personal motivation (Thoroughgood et al., 2012). The followers in this study portrayed the role of the conformer and were bystanders in the team environment. When the participants described their personal experiences, I noticed they were quick to provide details of the events that took place. The common individual experiences included: feeling devalued, distrust for the leader, behavior affected the quality of work, and public humiliation. As a bystander, they witnessed a poisoned morale, high turnover, dysfunction/chaos, and fear in the work teams.

Turnover is often the result of organizational dysfunction, but it also affects employees because it increases the workload, which elevates stress levels. The following stories provide context about the follower's experiences (devalued, distrust for the leader, impacted the quality of work, and public humiliation) when they worked for destructive leaders.

*Devalued.* P1: The experience that I remember most when working for the destructive leader who micro-managed my work was how it made me feel, like devalued. I am a people pleaser, and I just want to make people happy. If you tell me, I am doing something wrong, I am going to crack down, and I will do it right the next time, but every time you tell me I am doing something wrong after you have told me how to do it, it just takes at stabbing at your ego.

P9: When I working for a destructive leader, he made me feel devalued. I had worked very hard in my job and received my graduate degree to meet the promotion requirements. Unfortunately, I was not promoted. It was obvious he disregarded everything that I was doing to development myself as an employee, and when it was time to make a recommendation for a staff role, he did not recommend me. I asked him why. He asked, “how long have you been a manager,” I said, “five years.” He thought that I had only been a manager for two years, which disqualified me. I was devastated and discouraged because I had worked so hard to be promoted, and it was evident that my director did not care about me.

*Distrust.* P3: When I was a young military officer, I found that I had to be a buffer between the senior officers and my troops because of the distrust and lack of respect for the senior officer. To lessen the internal conflict, I intervened to deflect the destructive behaviors so when crap would trickle down, it would hinder my team, and we could complete the mission. As a result, I was dissatisfied because I had to be the gatekeeper, and it created a lot of tension within the department.

P4: I absolutely do not trust my supervisor because of how she took the word of management and refused to listen to my part of the story and the drastic disciplinary actions that were taken to tarnish my reputation. They lied about approving my employee education tuition assistance, and I was humiliated in front of the school administrator when the education card was declined. Not to mention, I was not prepared to pay the tuition bill. When I mentioned the tuition mishap to my supervisor she said, “Oh I thought if you paid it before the discipline action was in effect the payment would be processed.” I did tell the employee relations I do not trust her, and I never say anything to my boss because she basically just turns everything around for negative.

P8: I have begun to distrust my boss because of the chaos and conflict she creates. She would tell me I do not understand why you cannot get this tasking done sooner. Your peers are done. I was told to get her calendar and be prepared to explain myself. I would talk to my peers on other teams and found out they were no sooner to completing the task than I. The executive’s administrative assistant believes she tries to create conflict as a motivator. It has created distrust, and you begin to believe you are set up for failure.

*Impacted quality of work.* P2: The senior leader I supported did not know how to assess his audience and did not listen to his subordinates when they tried to help him prepare for presentations with internal and external stakeholders. A consequence to his behavior impacted the quality of the work.

It made for very long nights because as his advisor planner, I had to think of way and options to help change the perceptions and help better run the organization which was kind of falling apart. The executive tried to manipulate as opposed to leading and let the organization kind of follow you and instead of, whereas a destructive leader looked at it as short-term goals and actions, the more effective leader that I work for now considers both short-term and long-term.

P4: My management has negatively impacted the quality of work. For instance, after being reprimanded for doing my job, I now second-guess myself by double-checking my work and question what I say for fear I may do something wrong.

P10: Because the executive I support is unpredictable, it impacts the day-to-day work for myself and the team. On many occasions, she was missing so the team and myself were left scrambling to make up for all the things that the executive wasn't doing. The quality of work suffered.

*Public humiliation.* P5: If I unintentionally break a rule or policy, the boss reprimands me in public and will start throwing things. For instance, he turned over a table and stuff went flying all over the work area. When he finished ranting, everyone had to clean up the mess and return to work before the next blow up.

P6: It was normal to experience verbal abuse by the director in my department. For example, when I made a mistake she screamed at me in front of everybody, even if it was not my mistake, but hers. If I corrected her, she would yell at me and report to my boss that I was disgruntled. She would also call me names on many occasions.

In addition to the verbal abuse, she was also inconsiderate of my time. For instance, many times she would come by my desk at 4:30 pm to give me a task and expect it to be done before I left for the day.

P8: My previous supervisor had asked me to read the regulations on the physical training policies and ensure that the unit's physical training program is compliant. Okay, totally it was in my realm I absolutely could do that. So I read the regulations, I drafted a plan, I sent that plan through my fellow officers, I showed my boss. Everybody was on board, including my boss. My supervisor then told me to brief it at the next stand up meeting. As I am briefing the program, he was the first one to disagree with the plan I presented and then everyone followed suit behind him and stated, "We can't do that, that is a terrible idea." I was totally taken aback and embarrassed. This was in front of all my peers; it was like having the rug pulled out from under me.

The following stories illustrate the participant's experiences as bystanders (dysfunction, chaos, poisoned morale, and high turnover) when they worked for destructive leaders.

*Dysfunction/chaos.* P1: The work environment was highly dysfunctional because there were so many things thrown at us by the director, making it impossible to focus and get one thing done. She was perfectly fine with incomplete projects because she does not finish anything. She comes up with all these little ideas and then throws it at people to do. Personally, I prefer to finish the project I started because I put value in my work. If I am going to put something out for others to see I want it to be accurate and I want to be professional. She does not care. She sends out emails that are difficult to comprehend and the sentences are incomplete. An environment that is dysfunctional and chaotic it creates more rework for the team.

In addition to the dysfunctional environment, the director she is demeaning to her employees. I have witnessed the new payroll person quickly become very overwhelmed and it was affecting her physically and emotionally. When I was at my desk, I would watch her walk back in the room, and it was clear she had just been crying and it was a direct result of the director criticizing her daily in front of the team.

In my two years in the department working for this director, the employee turnover has been high. The department has ten employees, six have left, and of the six replacement hires, three have resigned. Something is wrong when there is constant turnover in one department.

P8: When I was a section manager and a subordinate under the command of my supervisor had been sexually assaulted, my commander blamed her for the incident and did not take the allegations seriously. I very much felt that I had to be the buffer between the commander and my troops. I absolutely needed to be her advocate, and I felt had to take on the responsibility because the destructive leader did not care.

P9: When I took a position in the marketing department, I immediately noticed there was a high level of dysfunction and chaos. The way the executive directors would scream at each other. The environment was just awful, and I felt very uncomfortable. The subordinates walked on eggshells because they were afraid of the senior executive and believed she could destroy your career in the company if she did not like you. I personally never had a confrontation with the senior executive, but I saw and heard what everyone else was going through, which made me more uncomfortable because I do not think people should be treated that way.

The first time I met her was when I first joined the department she told me that she was a people person. Of course, I was thinking silently, no you are not. If employees want to talk with her, you have to make an appointment with her administer assistant, but she says she has an open door policy. I have observed a lot of people coming out of the senior executive's office crying. I have witnessed her direct reports fear her in meetings to a point they will not disagree with her because they are worried about that she will destroy their careers.

P10: The executive I worked for was usually missing in action creating dysfunction and chaos. We scrambled to make up for all the things that she was not doing. As a result, her subordinates were doing their projects and the executive's job.

*High turnover.* P4: It is no secret within the company specifically in my department there is an extremely high turnover rate. An employee leaves once a month, once a month in a department of thirty-five employees the turnover is high. I have witnessed very competent, capable, and talented people leave the company because of the unrealistic expectations, being devalued, distrust of management, the dysfunction, and lack of respect for subordinates.

Many have left because they were lead to believe the quality of their work sucked and made to feel you are never good enough. The stress was too great for some and they became physically ill. What is interesting and funny is management does not train, coach, or mentor employees to help them to be successful in their job. I have seen repeatedly

where management will throw their employees under the bus to please an internal customer.

P5: In my field of work continuity is important because there is so much to learn about building products. Unfortunately, continuity is lacking because of the high turnover caused by the supervisor's destructive behavior. The problem with high turnover is the impact to current employees because we have to train the new employees, which takes time away from my work, and I end up putting in serious overtime, which is frowned upon.

*Poisoned morale.* P4: In addition to turnover, management has poisoned the morale in the department. Hey I am not sugar coating it, morale is down out of eight departments in the organization. The department I worked scored yellow or red for an entire year. It was like one of those things where management did not ever want to talk about the dysfunction in the department.

P7: In multiple cases I have witnessed things where the leader displayed hostile behaviors such as times, yelling, screaming, getting to the point where they were ready to fight a peer over an issue in a foreign country. These types of behaviors are not conducive to a well performing team and in every case the teams met kind of their minimum goals, expectations but with very low morale.

You definitely find instances where the team performs like functioning alcoholics in the way they conduct their task, but you knew that from a personal perspective, from a dynamics perspective the team was not really functioning well. I think that the destructive leadership behavior destroys organizations because of the kind of wake in their path in some form or another. It may affect the bottom line; it may not, but definitely has a negative impact on the employees. We all walk away with our stories.

### **Summary of Research Question One**

To summarize, the first question asked, what were the followers' lived experiences when they worked for leaders perceived as destructive? The interviews portrayed compelling and personal meanings of the followers understanding of destructive behaviors and their experiences working for a toxic leader.

**Research question two.** The themes that emerged from the analysis will answer the second research question, "How did the destructive behaviors affect the personal and professional lives of the followers?" (see Table 6).

1. Follower's Personal Impact and Reactions to the Destructive Behaviors.

## 2. Follower's Personal Leadership Style Influenced by Experiences.

Table 6

*How did the destructive behaviors impact the personal and professional lives of followers?*

Themes	Characteristics
3. Followers Personal Impact and Reactions to the Destructive Behavior	Impact: psychological exhaustion, no work/life balance, impact to credibility. Reaction: lowered engagement, avoidance, and/or resignation.
4. Followers Personal Leadership Style Influenced by Experiences	Compassionate, open and understanding, servant leader, built trust, no verbal abuse, consider others feelings, and self-awareness.

***Theme #3: Followers personal impact and reactions to the destructive behaviours.*** The followers describe how destructive leadership behaviours affected their personal and professional. When leaders are destructive, they will harm followers negatively affecting their psychological and physical health, personal life, and professional life (Tepper, 2000; Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, & Carr, 2007). During this part of the interview, it was noticeably uncomfortable for participants as they recounted their negative experiences.

I noticed changes in their speech and body language. There was apprehension, long pauses, the tone of voice was meek, they stared at the floor, constantly changing their seated position, and exhibited agitation. I did ask additional questions for clarity because of the vagueness in the responses. The participants did explain they experienced psychological distress such as anxiety, depression, stress, and emotional exhaustion. Organizations are paying out billions in medical claims because of overly stressed employees (Xie & Schaubroek, 2001). They explained how the leaders' destructive behavior had a negative impact on the followers' professional credibility. A participant nearly lost all credibility because of the unethical decisions she made to support the executive's lies.

The participants also shared how they coped with the destructive leader. Another participant explained he drank to cope with the stress. Other participants adversely impacted by the toxic leaders engaged in supervisor or organizational deviance. When supervisors mistreat subordinates, they look to gain control through retaliation and negative reciprocity (Goulder, 1960; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002). In this study, a few participants retaliated by lowering their engagement to a point of doing what was required of them and nothing more. Another act of deviance was retaliation against the company by quitting their jobs. The following stories share the details of how the toxic leaders adversely affected their personal and professional life such as emotional and mental exhaustion, no work life balance, negative impact to their professional credibility.

*Emotional/mental exhaustion.* P1: In my experience, I worked for destructive leaders and it affected me in various ways. In the data entry job, I would go home in tears every night, which is atypical for a happy person.

The stress of somebody watching over you all day impacts your performance because you are going to either try to rush if you are being timed and cause errors, or you are going to go slower and make sure everything is accurate taking the chance that you will be yelled at for not moving faster.

P3: The bad leaders did affect my personal and professional life. I cannot turn it off because I care about what I do and what impact I am making. Therefore, if I am not able to make a positive impact or there is a reason for that, it definitely trickles over and I am angry about it or depressed or whatever the case and it also takes time to let that go. I have also experienced the Sunday night blues on more than one occasion because of working for a destructive leader and in a toxic environment. On Sunday night, I am at home and dreading going back to work come Monday morning.

Now that I am in a job that I love and I don't have those stresses, I actually think on Sunday like, oh I am going back to work, it kind of sucks, but I like my leadership, I like what I am doing.

P4: Professionally I have to wade through the destructive behaviors and toxic environment, which made my job emotionally and mentally exhausting. I have to tip toe around my boss to make sure the information I communicated is not misconstrued or twisted around to mean something different. I also constantly worried how else she is going to try to destroy my credibility with my customers and team.

In regards to my personal life, it definitely had a negative impact, but I was fortunate to have a good support system with family and friends. For the most part I am



probably really good about compartmentalizing the lives, but at the same time I don't think that a hundred percent you can compartmentalize.

The stress I have experienced with my current boss has negatively affected my personal life. I don't feel happy or satisfied and have become somewhat nonfunctional in my personal life and experienced pure exhaustion. After the most recent altercation with my director, where she threw me under the bus, revoked my tuition assistance, and enforced disciplinary action on my performance report, I did not have the energy to do stuff around the house or go out and see friends. When exposed to a destructive environment we do not realize the domino negative affect it has on employees.

P5: When working for the destructive leader I had a good support system, but after a while, it tears you down. At one point, I would go home have a couple of drinks and go to bed. In addition, there are times that I skipped going out somewhere because I just did not want to be around people. The stress gets to you.

P6: The daily verbal abuse really stressed me out and felt the destructive director was trying to destroy my career. She would go out of her way to tell my boss how incompetent I was at my job. Her complaints were not valid. My coworkers witnessed many things and they tried to back me up, but it was her word against my word or against our word.

The work stress did affect my personal life a lot. I was depressed all the time, and I would sometimes cry. I was not enjoying or happy at all. I was so exhausted; I didn't go out with friends or family. I dreaded Sunday night, because I had to go back to work, you know, stuff like that, it just bothers my life.

P8: When you initially start working in a toxic environment you believe, I can work through this, I can be stronger than this, but just over time it just wears you down.

I don't think anyone goes into work and says, I am going to work and give it fifty percent today but after a while it is just. I started to notice I was always exhausted and did not want to engage with my family. I am not talking as much, and I have a son, like mommy doesn't want to play right now mommy is tired. That wasn't fair to him or my husband. It gets hard to separate the stress at work and turn it off when you get home. My husband was supportive, but it became a point of contention, and he asked that I find a new job.

P9: Working for a destructive leader was draining. I had no enthusiasm to come into work. I was like a robot. The only reason I continued to do my job well was my work ethic. My father instilled that in me, but I dreaded coming to work because it was stressful, and I did not want to be there. I could not wait for the weekends.

P10: I was certainly stressed, and I did take it home. I felt that there was a lot of pressure on me to make sure that I was doing my job correctly, and I didn't know how. I would go home, and I would think about it and try to figure out how could I get my boss to show up to work. What can I do to make her show up to meetings? Do I need to walk with her? Do I need to become more hands on? Maybe I have to be a babysitter, but unfortunately being a single mom, I didn't have that time, I was already babysitting a kid and that was my own child. That stressed me out though because if I wasn't doing my job then I

thought what am I going to do? What if I am not doing a great job and that comes out in the performance evaluation and I lose my job? How am I going to pay my mortgage? How am I going to put money away for college? I started to become paranoid.

*No work/life balance.* P1: The stress of my job started to bleed into my personal life. It definitely affected the home life because I am very outgoing, upbeat happy person, and happy people don't cry every day. My husband and I were newlyweds and everyday he told me to leave the job because I don't like what it is doing to you.

In my current job, I do not have work life balance. I work extremely long hours because the director's expectations of things to be done are unrealistic, which creates concern and fear, which could affect my career credibility. The reason I believe my credibility has been impacted is tied to the director's incompetence. I will provide her with the details for a presentation, but when she presents the data, it comes out like a hundred and fifty degrees different. The executives do not get the right information so it makes the department look incompetent in many ways. For instance, she will give me credit in the meeting for the data presented, but it makes me look bad because the data is wrong.

P2: In my experience working for destructive leader I had no work life balance. I would get into work at seven o'clock in the morning and could stay until seven o'clock at night because the executive didn't plan accordingly and wanted the project done before morning. Most often, the next morning he would change his mind and it would be another long night. It started to affect my family life, especially being a new father. I was fortunate to have a supported wife, but the long nights were stressful.

P10: There was no work life balance when I worked for this executive. It was normal to cancel my vacations because I didn't know if that was the day the executive would come in the office, and if she did, then there are things that I need to get in front of her, and I need to make sure she actually takes care of them. At one point I would come into the office on the weekend to take care of her work, but was informed by a senior administrative assistant that working over 40 hours in a week was a huge violation and not charging the company for the overtime. I was told to stop that. Meanwhile I am committing all of these violations against the company ethically breaking human resource. So that increased my stress because once I found out that I was breaking the law, I was like oh my God now I am definitely going to be fired.

*Impacted professional credibility.* P1: I feel my advancement opportunities are limited because when the director shares my data with others, it does not come out right; it comes out all messed up. She cannot explain it because she does not understand it, because she does not know her own industry.

P2: When I supported the senior executive who mostly concerned with short-term thinking it hurt from a personal development standpoint. To meet his expectations I started thinking in short-term, and it was not healthy for my career.

P4: My management does not empower employees, and in my role that is crucial to have credibility with the stakeholders. For instance, there was a situation with an internal customer who was unhappy about a decision I made on the program. They called my director and she scheduled a meet to discuss it. In this meeting, it was my boss, her boss, the customer, and myself. In the meeting I was told to do what the customer asked and had no chance to justify my decision. I lost credibility with that customer, who dismisses my role in the project.

P10: The leader's incompetence started to hurt my credibility with peers and other executives. My team did not look at me as a resource. As an administration assistant, you should be the communication point between your boss and their team.

Now, I was seen as incompetent, but I didn't actually have work to do, the company was paying me for time that I was not working because nobody was coming to me.

In addition to their stories as to how they were impacted by the destructive leaders behavior each participant described their reactions (lowered engagement, avoidance, and/or resignation) against the leader and the organization.

*Avoidance.* P1: I am a people pleaser and avoid conflict. I did talk to the senior executive about the director's destructive behaviour, but I have not talked to the director. I do fear retribution because she is very combative. Sure the stress has impacted my personal and professional life, but the company has good benefits, and I haven't hit the point where I hate my job yet.

P2: Today I do not work for a bad boss, but I did find that when I worked for the military boss who was condescending I did not confront him just to avoid the conflict and possible retribution. As a bystander, I witnessed as he ridiculed and criticized subordinates in public. As a Millennial, we are looking at the bigger picture, I am looking at my job as a way to do what I truly want to do and will jump ship if the company I work for does not value me. Whereas the Boomers look at their job as their identity, I think.

P3: In my experience working for destructive leaders it is best not to confront them because you don't believe they are going change anyways. It just makes things uncomfortable for me as the follower if nothing is done about his behavior.

P4: As an employee who now works for a destructive leader I would not consider myself a follower because they are not leaders, my management is not a leader so I will not consider myself a follower of them. Do you have a problem being a follower, no, but I will only follow good leaders. In my current position, I have decided not to reason with my manager because it is best to avoid conflict since there is a great possibility she will continue to destroy my credibility.

I am unable to look for other positions in the company because of the derogatory remarks she has placed in my file, so I have chosen to keep quiet with my head down and maintain low engagement.

P6: I will chose to avoid conflict with the destructive manager. I believe it was not worth my time because Human Resources did not take care of the problem. I would rather spend my time moving up the ladder and try to avoid as much conflict as I could and do the work and get to that level that you want. But in that position I thought I could go above and beyond, but after the incidents and the way they treated me I didn't move up.

P8: I noticed when working for the bad boss that my demeanor changed and I would avoid her by taking a different path to my desk to not be seen by her. I started to just not care what she told me, because it wasn't really that important. And I just didn't want to be there, you know. I started looking for other opportunities and you are just waiting your time and which you are not doing your best.

*Lowered engagement.* P2: With the two bad leaders I experienced, I was not engaged as I could have been. I am not going to operate at a hundred percent if you, so I guess I am correlating destructive a lot with micro managing like you don't trust me, you are always watching me, not letting me operate at my full potential so why would I. So I am not going to give you a hundred percent because I know my sixty percent and then you are going to do the rest.

*Resigned.* P3: Understand, I am extremely loyal to a company if they value my contributions, the second you stop or you are not utilizing me or misaligning me and don't listen and all those other things, yeah I am not going to be loyal to you because you are not being loyal to me. I didn't stick around when I work for the bad leader. I will seek out other opportunities.

P5: I am very unhappy with the company I work for because upper management does not address the toxic behavior. I would leave for another job, but in my field this behavior is everywhere. For me I am putting all my time outside of work to start my own business. I hope to be able to leave the company in 2015. Can't wait.

P6: Because of the experiences with the bad leader I resigned from the company. It was a tough decision because I loved my job. I loved it a lot, but had to make a choice because the stress was wearing on me. I moved on and I am in a better place right now.

### **Summary of Theme Three**

The participants found difficulty in talking about how the destructive leaders' behavior adversely impacted their lives. Most had to make some tough choices to protect themselves and their families. As a result, there were ethical challenges that impacted credibility and because of

the lack of trust for their supervisor and organization some chose to leave the company.

Destructive leadership had detrimental consequences, but the destructive leaders were still successful because of susceptible followers and organizational cultures that support toxic leaders. The fourth theme provides insight of how toxic leaders impacted the followers' leadership style.

***Theme #4: Follower's personal leadership style influenced by experiences.*** When a follower has worked for a destructive leader, there is cause for concern that the follower will adopt the bad behaviors. In a study conducted by Ayree, Chen, Sun, and Debrah (2007) they discovered that supervisors who were adversely impacted by a destructive leader when they were a subordinate were more likely to abuse their employees. The results of this study are reason for concern, especially when the next generation of leaders, the Millennials, prefer to abide by the rules, strive to please others, has little trust in leadership, and demonstrates low self-efficacy (Trickey & Hyde, 2009). These characteristics are indicative of conformers who are unable to stand up to toxic leaders, passive, and demonstrate low self-esteem (Padilla et al., 2007). The follower plays a significant role in the leadership process, which may contribute to the success of destructive leadership, but it is difficult for destructive leaders to succeed when the follower is courageous and the organizational culture is stable with checks and balances. The Millennials in this study were conformers, but nine of the ten have learned from the destructive leader and have chosen to practice positive leadership.

*Personal leadership.* P1: I know myself well and over time will become a product of my environment. I am extremely fearful that the destructive work environment will eventually change me and I will become a leader that I hate. I don't want to get to that point.

P2: In my experience with bad leaders I have become more compassionate. I take the time to care for my employees and listen to their feedback. For example when I first took command, I was upfront about my expectations with my troops.

I had four general rules (1) you don't beat your spouse, (2) you do not use drugs or use alcohol, (3) don't drink and drive, and (4) always give 100% at work. I made it

very clear that as long as these rules were not broken, I will never kick you out, and I will always fight for you.

P3: My personal leadership style aligns with the practice of servant leadership and has probably been enhanced by bad leaders. Bad leaders provide a vivid picture of what I don't want to be and allow me to move in an opposite direction.

P4: Now, my destructive leaders haven't really shaped my leadership style, but just reaffirmed that I am good leader. It makes me feel better to know that I am not going to be that type of leader. As an employee who suffered from a great deal of work related stress, employee suicide has greatly affected my leadership style. I will definitely be open to understanding more perspectives and really understand what is going on and try to think about how it may affect somebody. I want to be sensitive of how I see or carry messages, but really recognize and try to provide that open environment to allow employees to feel they could talk with me if I hurt their feelings. I will be a little more considerate to people's circumstances.

I do wonder if the future leaders, the Millennial generation will be different from the current generation of leaders. Are they really going to be that different when tradition passes on and gradually they might change slightly? So if destructive leadership behavior keeps being passed on, passed on, and passed on we are going to see it in Millennials too, so what stops it?

P5: As a leader today, I understand that the relationship between the subordinates and myself needs to be healthy. If you don't keep them healthy they are not going to do the work for you that you want them to do.

P6: How have the bad leader affected my leadership today? Yeah, a lot, I mean I treated people with respect like the way that I would like me to be treated. I think I work well with them and we have open communication. It changed my life around where I don't want to be that person.

P7: Now I will say that with those bad leaders, in terms of what I have learned, definitely you learn what not to do in terms of behaviors. Don't scream at people, don't yell at people, and definitely don't get into altercation that almost leads to fist fights that type of thing. I do believe the destructive leaders can have good qualities in terms of techniques, tools that are not immoral or unethical ways of getting things done, and there are some things that they can do from a relational perspective that are good, that you can learn from. Moreover, in those cases I have always observed and tried to take the positive out of that person.

P8: The bad leaders have not tainted me. In fact, I think you can learn from them. Every leader I have worked for, there were some things that I liked and have used those techniques. For me personally, my leadership style is more situational. I try to flex, know your audience.

P9: I would consider myself an effective manager; I think that the experiences with the bad leaders helped me be more aware of what I am doing, as a leader, and a researcher. I really take into account other people's feelings versus automatically discounting their opinions.

P10: If anything I have learned that trust is crucially important in the follower-leaders relationship. When trust is not there it is only going to end bad for everybody and there is no point in that.

### **Summary Research Question Two**

As demonstrated in the section above, the participants shared their stories and described in detail how the destructive leaders' negative behaviors affected their personal and professional lives. The stories were tough to share because of the difficulty in reliving the events that took place when they worked for the toxic leader. Finally, before I ended the interview I had asked each participant on last question, "how has the destructive leader influenced you as a leader?" Nine of the participants believe you can learn a lot from both good and bad leaders. As a result, majority of the participants are aware of the shadow they cast over their subordinates and the adverse impact toxic leaders have with followers and the organizational effectiveness.

### **Chapter Four Summary**

All participants in this study had worked for a destructive leader during their professional careers. The intention of this research was to make sense of their personal experience with toxic leaders and understand the impact it had in their lives. The data showed that the participants were able to clearly articulate their feelings, thoughts, and experiences in the interviews. As a result, this study has provided compelling stories of followers who endured the negative effects of a leader's destructive behavior.

The final chapter presents the discussion of the findings from the study, a conclusion to the study, implications for theory and practice, and finally, the limitation and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter V: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

The findings from this qualitative study confirmed that leaders' destructive behaviors do affect followers both professionally and personally. Toxic leadership is antithetical to constructive leadership, and the traits and characteristics portrayed by destructive leaders have negatively affected their followers (Aubrey, 2012). The common thread with all participant stories was their focus was on the ends with little regard for the means when they worked for a destructive leader. As a result, it created a follower who was less effective, and engagement was abysmal. Nine of the participants articulated that they were influenced by the bad leaders' behaviors to be better leaders themselves and are self-aware of how their behaviors impact others. In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the findings, conclusion, implications of theory, implications of practice, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings are in line with my expectations and previously reported research on susceptible followers, specifically those who are conformers and bystanders. This study focused on the followers' perspectives and experiences, but the other two components of the theoretical model were significant in the experience and are included in this final discussion. The details I identified in this study were supported by previous studies mentioned in chapter two, the literature review. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the consequences of destructive leadership behavior through the followers' lived experiences and perceptions when working in a service organization. The two research questions were answered through personal interviews with 10 participants who had worked for a destructive leader during their careers.

The discussion of each question validates the theoretical framework and identifies the adverse effects toxic leadership has on followers.



**Research Question One.** What were the followers' lived experiences when working for destructive leaders? As noted in chapter 4, through my qualitative analysis of the participants' personal stories, two themes emerged from the data that answered the first research question:

1. Insidious behaviors that were experienced by follower; and
2. The follower's experience in a toxic work environment

**Leaders.** The first theme that emerged from the interviews was the leaders' destructive behaviors that were systematic and repeated over time. This data was significant because it substantiated the followers understanding of the leaders destructive behaviors and aided in their described experiences. The followers listed some of the common destructive behaviors to including micro-management, coercion, condescension, failed to listen to the follower, use of manipulation for personal gain, unethical behavior, and undermining their subordinates. These described behaviors are consistent with those found in previous studies like discounting feedback from followers, social undermining, and insulting and criticizing subordinates (Duffy et al., 2002; Thoroughgood et al., 2012). The use of power for personal gain is another destructive behavior (Padilla et al., 2007). One follower witnessed abuse of power when the leader covered up mistakes and failures when they were clearly her fault. These described behaviors are destructive naturally, but become volatile when susceptible followers are compliant and carry out orders. The leaders discussed in this study were from the baby boomer generation and the followers were all of the Millennial generation. The next theme addresses the followers' personal experiences when they worked in a toxic environment.

**Followers.** The followers experience in a toxic environment is the second theme that I identified. The participants reflected on their individual feelings of being devalued, developing distrust for the leader, the leader's bad behavior impacting the quality of work, and experiencing

public humiliation. The followers in this study were conformers because they showed behaviors of being compliant, passive, and obedient (Padilla et al., 2007). According to Barbuto (2000), a follower's compliance is determined by three influence triggers: to include the follower's perception of the leader's level of power; sources of motivation to comply (external tangible factors, internal goals and values, and self-affirmation); and the follower's level of immunity to destructive leader (Thoroughgood et al., 2012). The conformers in the study experienced damaged self-esteem by the leaders' control and manipulation. Low follower self-efficacy was a factor, and the majority respected the rules and as a result acted immorally (Kohlberg, 1969; Bandura, 1986; Padilla et al., 2007). For example, one follower explained how she lied to protect her boss who was domineering and unethical. The followers also described their experiences as bystanders in the work environment.

There are three subtypes to the conformer component to include lost souls, authoritarians, and bystanders. The lost souls rely on leaders for their identity and affirmation of belongingness. Authoritarians will follow a leader because of status and power and bystanders are passive and motivated by fear of consequences (Raven, 1993; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Padilla et al., 2007). In this study the followers were bystanders because they were passive observers, did not challenge the leader, and feared punishment and/or losing their job for disobeying the leader. The bystanders experienced poisoned morale, high turnover, dysfunction/chaos, and fear. The followers shared stories of physical fighting between the boss and a subordinate, bosses throwing things at employees, and of executives screaming at each other in the office.

When these events took place, the followers were more inclined to comply with the destructive leader out of fear of the consequences of not obeying. Literature suggests that a

destructive leader is only successful with compliant followers and an organizational culture that supports the harmful behaviors.

**Organization.** Another important finding revealed in the data analysis was the fact that none of the destructive leaders experienced consequences in the form of disciplinary actions to correct their harmful behavior. In fact, the contrary was true. Personal stories of the participants disclosed the promotion of a few executives who repeatedly abused their subordinates through fear, coercive power, and intimidation. When subordinates witness zero consequences for bad behavior, the message is loud and clear. In this study, the focus was on Millennial followers because they are the next generation of leaders. Today, organizations are not setting a good example.

According to Padilla et al (2007), organizational destructiveness exists when leaders invoke misfortune on subordinates, stakeholders, and the institution. One participant reported the bad leader's behavior to the human resource department and was informed that there were several grievances filed against the leader. The follower was shocked about the news, decided to leave the company, and wrote a letter to the CEO expressing her dissatisfaction because they supported the bad leader. Over time, organizational destructiveness will affect the personal and professional life of the employees and, in some cases, cause the collapse of the organization.

In summary, the constructivist approach helped me to understand the meanings and complexities of the followers lived experiences working for a destructive leader. Destructive leadership does not thrive in isolation. The followers were very descriptive about the types of bad leadership behavior they witnessed and personally experienced.

We also know that the organizational culture is significant in the role toxic leadership. There should be great concern that organizations are enabling destructive leaders and showing no

support for the courageous followers. In some cases, the culture enables the toxic behavior and incentivizes subordinates to embrace the destructive behaviors because it may lead to a promotion within a company (Aubrey, 2012). If the current culture of Millennials does not confront destructive leaders, it may result in a future generation of spineless leaders. The long-term impact on corporate cultures could be costly and painful. Followers are pivotal to the success of good and bad leaders (Bennis, 2010). Destructive leadership is a vicious cycle that will continue to perpetuate until organizations and those in leadership positions stop enabling destructive leaders, educate and train leaders to be constructive, and encourage followers to be courageous by challenging the views of leadership and offering constructive criticism (Chaleff, 2008).

**Research question two.** How did the destructive behaviors affect the personal and professional lives of the followers? Two themes emerged from the analysis and framed the participant's responses.

1. Follower's Personal Impact and Reactions to the Destructive Behaviors
2. Follower's Personal Leadership Style Influenced by Experiences

The second theme that materialized from the study was the personal impact followers endured from the destructive behaviours and the actions they took to cope with the consequences. It was evident through the interviews that the negative impact to the followers surpassed job satisfaction and performance. In fact, they experienced psychological distress: to include emotional and mental exhaustion; absence of work life balance; and impact to their credibility by the incompetence and dysfunction of leadership.

In previous literature, psychological distress can be manifested through depression (Tepper, 2000), emotional exhaustion (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003), and family-work conflicts (Tepper et al., 2006).

When a person experiences emotional exhaustion in the work environment, it is tied to verbal abuse (Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007). A participant described how her boss would scream and yell at her every day. In other personal stories participants recounted how they were too exhausted to partake in family activities, experienced anxiety on Sunday night, and felt constantly stressed. Participants also experienced damage to their credibility. One participant shared how the unethical acts she committed to protect her bad boss eventually reflected badly on her. She was devastated and had to rebuild her credibility before she could pursue future opportunities within the company. Another participant sacrificed family time to be sure the boss was prepared for presentations only to find out the incompetence of the boss made him look inept. This research clearly demonstrated the destructive leaders negatively impacted these employees and the findings are consistent with prior research (Breux, Perrew, Hall, Frink, & Hockwater, 2008; Herscovis & Barling, 2010; Tepper, 2000; Wu & Hu, 2009). In the absence of organizational support with the destructive leaders, the followers took matters into their own hands to protect themselves and their careers.

***Reactions to destructive behaviors.*** As a result of their experiences, all of the participants took some form of action to protect themselves from the bad leaders. By choice some followers decided to lower their engagement, some chose to avoid the boss, and a few resigned. All of the participants were high performers, loyal to the company, and enjoyed their jobs. These interviews demonstrated that working for a destructive leader changes one's mindset because one no longer feels valued.

One's energy is consumed by emotional exhaustion, fear, and stress. This is consistent with the research that shows that when employees believe they are no longer valued, they may withhold ideas, resist change, and be less productive (Thompson, 2008). As one participant stated, "I don't decide to only give fifty percent, but over time the exhaustion becomes so great that is all I can give." In line with this, another participant said, "Bad leadership drained my productivity and engagement. When I am working for a bad leader, I tend to focus on the bare minimums and use my remaining efforts to seek other positions/roles."

Turnover is another factor that damages organizational cultures that foster toxic leadership. This may have long-term negative effects on organizations. Seven of the participants chose to resign from their positions or their companies, leaving the bad leader still with the company. As mentioned previously, one follower resigned the job she loved because of a bad leader who had 10 grievances against her. When the participant wrote the CEO, he didn't understand the issue. Another participant was a young leader himself in the military and loved his country, but did not renew his contract because of the experiences with the bad leadership.

When organizations decline to correct bad leaders, then followers take matters into their own hands and retaliate against the leader and organization to cope with the destructive leaders. Subtle retaliation in the form of lowered engagement, avoidance, and/or resignation proved to be safer versus direct deviance (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2009). Literature supports that negative leadership causes displaced deviance by followers and damages the employees' commitment to the organization, which endangers the organizational culture and climate (Aubrey, 2012).

The final theme from the second question emerged because it behooves leaders and organizations to understand how bad leadership has affected the followers' personal leadership style. The 10 participants articulated their experiences when they worked for a destructive leader,

and there should be concern that the bad behaviors would cascade down the line to our future leaders. According to Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, followers will learn destructive behaviors from the leaders. While this may be the case for some followers, nine participants in this study make a conscious effort to be constructive leaders. For example, one participant made the comment, "bad leaders provide a vivid picture of what I don't want to be, and allowed me to move in the opposite direction." The participants also believe it is also important be compassionate, build trust in the leader-follower relationship, and make the time to listen and support your employees.

In summary, the second theme focused on the antecedents related to destructive leadership, specifically how it affected the followers. For all participants, the insidious behavior took a toll on their professional lives. In some cases, the behaviors sabotaged their careers and created conflict with personal obligations. Each person chose a way to cope with their leader's insidious behavior, but the choices still affected the follower in the end and did not affect the leader. It is impressive to see, in these participants, examples of this future generation of leaders learn from their leader's bad behavior become cognizant of their behaviors, and consciously work to be a good leader.

## **Conclusion**

The negative impacts of a leader's destructive behaviors are detrimental to the followers in an organization. The purpose of this research study was to explore the consequences of destructive leadership behavior through the followers' lived experiences and perceptions when they worked in a service organization. This qualitative research study confirmed that negative consequences are a result of a leader's destructive behaviors and violate the legitimate interest of the follower's role and their commitment to the organization. Through the interviews, I heard 10

compelling stories from followers about their experiences working for leaders who are perceived as destructive. In particular, they described the leader's destructive behaviors, recounted their personal experiences working in dysfunctional work environments, and described how these experiences impacted them personally and professionally. These consequences are in line with the toxic triangle model, which depicts the interdependencies between destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and a conducive work environment (Padilla et al., 2007).

By examining the participants' shared experiences this study has contributed to the body of knowledge by offering insights into a Millennial follower's lived experiences and how they were adversely affected by destructive leaders behaviors. The leaders in this study were destructive because they used manipulation for self-promotion, engaged in unethical behaviors, ignored feedback from subordinates, and intimidated followers through verbal abuse. As a result of these behaviors, followers did not trust the leaders, felt devalued, participated in unethical behavior induced by fear, chose to retaliate against the destructive leader, and lost faith in the organization because it implicitly condoned the leaders' bad behaviors because they provided results and successfully managed up.

One final comment, it was a real privilege to have had the opportunity to hear these compelling personal stories from these 10 participants.

There were times when it was unpleasant and troubling to relive their hurtful experiences and I was humbled by their trust in me and their belief in my research, which will help others learn from their experiences.

### **Implications for Theory**

This study contributed the existing body of knowledge and enabled me to shed light on the susceptible followers' experiences when they worked for a destructive leader. The



susceptible follower is a component of the toxic triangle model (Padilla et al., 2007). This model identified the interdependencies between destructive leadership, the susceptible follower, and the conducive environment. My qualitative study conducted personal interviews with participants who described the consequences of working for destructive leaders, how it affected them today, and as future leaders. Notably, the present study not only indicated how destructive leadership behaviors significantly adversely impacted them as followers, but the role the organizations played as the enabler in their absence of action. To this effect, my qualitative research filled an important gap in the destructive leadership literature that has not used personal interviews from followers to capture an in-depth understanding of their experiences and how it affected their lives. This study also focused on the followers who are of the Millennial generation, our future leaders.

### **Implications for Practice**

Destructive leadership is damaging to followers and organizations. Do not overlook this problem because of the serious long-term consequences, which in worst case could be life or death.

From a mindful perspective, academic institutions and corporations need to provide education and training for supervisors and subordinates in interpersonal skills, make them aware of the adverse consequences from destructive behaviors, provide a support system for those who have been victimized, stop enabling destructive leaders, and institute a zero tolerance policy for destructive behaviors.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

There are a few limitations with this study. First, the sensitivity of the topic created challenges. The participants were interviewed external to their work environment to ensure they

felt safe and protected from retribution from the leadership and organization. Given the opportunity to interview and observe the followers in their work environment would have enhanced the results. Second, I examined the individuals' perspective of their leader's destructive behaviors but did not include the teams' opinion; therefore, my study may not reflect a comprehensive perception of the leader. Third, the interviews took place at a point in time. A longitudinal research study would be beneficial to examine the short-term and long-term effects of destructive leadership on the followers' leadership style. Fourth, nine of the participants said they are constructive leaders. To validate their assumption, a future research should consider a qualitative study to examine their relationship with the followers. Fifth, this study only considered employees who have worked in a service organization to narrow the focus of the study. In future research it would be beneficial to study the impact destructive behavior has on the internal and external customers. For instance, interview the customers of followers who work for destructive leaders and compare it with those that work for constructive leaders. In final, a longitudinal study needs to investigate the financial loss to an organization when they lose high performing followers because of destructive leaders. For instance, what would the company gain if they kept the high performers and replaced the destructive leader with a constructive leader?

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

## Institutional Review Board Approval Form



6/27/2014

Rhonda Martin  
10743 Bar X Trail  
Helotes, Texas 78023

Dear Rhonda:

Your request to conduct the study titled *Consequences of Destructive Leadership Through the Experiences of Millennial Followers* was approved as an expedited study on 6/27/2014. Your IRB number is 14-06-012. Any written communication with potential subjects or subjects must be approved and include the IRB approval number. Electronic surveys or electronic consent forms, or other material delivered electronically to subjects must have the IRB approval number inserted into the survey or documents before they are used.

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

- This approval is for one year from the date of the IRB approval.
- Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the **IRB Continuation/Completion form**.
- Any desired changes in proposal procedures must be approved by the UIW IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the **Protocol Revision and Amendment form**.
- Prompt reporting to the UIW IRB of any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- IRBs are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about the IRB.

Suspension or termination of approval may be done if there is evidence of any serious or continuing noncompliance with Federal Regulations or any aberrations from the original application.

Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance, please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

*Rebecca Ohnemus, MAA, CRA*

Rebecca Ohnemus, MAA, CRA  
Research Officer  
University of the Incarnate Word IRB

## Appendix B

## Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Certificate

**COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI)****DREEBEN SCHOOL OF EDUCATION CURRICULUM COMPLETION REPORT**

Printed on 04/19/2014

**LEARNER**Rhonda Martin (ID: 1984537)  
10743 Bar X Trail  
Helotes  
TX 78023  
US**DEPARTMENT**

school of education

**PHONE**

210-846-8462

**EMAIL**

rmmarti3@student.uw.edu

**INSTITUTION**

University of the Incarnate Word

**EXPIRATION DATE**

04/16/2017

**DREEBEN SCHOOL OF EDUCATION****COURSE/STAGE:**

Basic Course/1

**PASSED ON:**

04/17/2014

**REFERENCE ID:**

12815728

REQUIRED MODULES	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction	04/17/14	3/3 (100%)
Students in Research	04/17/14	7/10 (70%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE	04/17/14	4/5 (80%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE	04/17/14	5/5 (100%)
The Regulations - SBE	04/17/14	4/5 (80%)
Assessing Risk - SBE	04/17/14	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE	04/17/14	4/5 (80%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE	04/17/14	4/5 (80%)
Research with Children - SBE	04/17/14	4/4 (100%)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE	04/17/14	4/4 (100%)
Internet Research - SBE	04/17/14	4/5 (80%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees	04/17/14	4/4 (100%)
Conflicts of Interest in Research Involving Human Subjects	04/17/14	4/5 (80%)
University of the Incarnate Word	04/17/14	No Quiz

For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI Program participating institution or be a paid Independent Learner. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI Program course site is unethical, and may be considered research misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.  
Professor, University of Miami  
Director Office of Research Education  
CITI Program Course Coordinator

## Appendix C

### Subject Consent to Take Part in a Study

#### Consequences of Destructive Leadership through the Experiences of Millennial Followers

#### University of the Incarnate Word

I am a graduate student at UIW working towards a doctorate degree in education with a concentration in organizational leadership.

1. You are being asked to take part in a research study conducted to explore the consequences of negative leadership from the follower's perspective.
2. I want to learn how the harmful behavior may impact followers today, and our future leaders tomorrow. The one-on-one interviews will provide an opportunity for followers to describe their experiences.
3. You are being asked to take part in this study because you are of the Millennial generation and will be our future leaders who may be impacted by destructive leaders.
4. If you decide to take part, I will go through some guided interview with questions to capture the essence of the experiences.
5. Some of the questions may surface unpleasant memories and if this occurs please bring it to the interview's attention.
6. As a participant in this study you may find a sense of relief in sharing your story. There may be future benefit from this research, but it cannot be guaranteed.
7. Everything learned about you in the study will be confidential. When the research results are published your participation will remain anonymous.
8. Your decision to take part in the study is voluntary. You are free to choose not to take part in the study or to stop taking part at any time.
9. If you have questions now, feel free to ask me. If you have additional questions later or you wish to report a problem that may be related to this study, contact: Rhonda Martin.
10. The University of the Incarnate Word committee that reviews research on human subjects, the Institutional Review Board, will answer any questions about your rights as a research subject (829-2759—Dean of Graduate Studies and Research).
11. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

## Appendix C (continued)

12. Your signature indicates that you (1) consent to take part in this research study, (2) that you have read and understand the information given above, and (3) that the information above was explained to you.

---

Signature of Subject

---

Signature of Witness

---

Signature of Investigator

---

Date/Time



## Appendix D

### Letter to Potential Subjects for the Study

Consequences of Destructive Leadership through the Experiences of Millennial Followers

University of the Incarnate Word

Dear Prospective Participant:

I am a graduate student at UIW working towards a doctorate degree in education with a concentration in organizational leadership.

1. You are being asked to take part in a research study conducted to explore the consequences of negative leadership from the follower's perspective.
2. I want to learn how the harmful behavior may impact followers today, and our future leaders tomorrow. The one-on-one interviews will provide an opportunity for followers to describe their experiences.
3. You are being asked to take part in this study because you are of the Millennial generation and will be our future leaders who may be impacted by destructive leaders.
4. If you decide to take part, I will go through some guided interview with questions to capture the essence of the experiences.
5. Some of the questions may surface unpleasant memories and if this occurs please bring it to the interview's attention.
6. As a participant in this study you may find a sense of relief in sharing your story. There may be future benefit from this research, but it cannot be guaranteed.
7. Everything learned about you in the study will be confidential. When the research results are published your participation will remain anonymous.
8. Your decision to take part in the study is voluntary. You are free to choose not to take part in the study or to stop taking part at any time.
9. If you have questions now, feel free to ask me. If you have additional questions later or you wish to report a problem that may be related to this study, contact: Rhonda Martin.
10. The University of the Incarnate Word committee that reviews research on human subjects, the Institutional Review Board, will answer any questions about your rights as a research subject (829-2759—Dean of Graduate Studies and Research).
11. You will be given a copy of this letter to keep.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Rhonda Martin

## Appendix E

### Interview Guided Questions

1. Tell me about your career after graduating from college.
2. Describe the type of leaders (manager and/or supervisor) you worked for during your career?
3. Provide examples of destructive behaviors demonstrated by the leader. What were the negative behaviors repeated over a period of time? How long did you work for this leader?
4. When working for the destructive leader did it affect your job satisfaction and the ability to perform your job? How did it affect your personal life? Specifically, how did it change the way you interacted with family and friends?
5. When you worked for the destructive leader, did you discuss the abuse with the perpetrator and/or their superior? If you did, what was the result? Did the behavior improve, or stay the same?
6. How has the experience with the destructive leader influenced you as a leader?

## Appendix F

### Qualitative Codebook

Category / Code Name	Description	Participants
<b>Leaders Destructive Behavior</b>		
Coercion	Misleading about policies, false reports to boss, demeaning remarks	1, 6, 7, 10
Condescending	Patronizing and better than followers, silent treatment, verbal abuse	1, 4, 5, 8
Unethical	Lying, cheating, dishonest, missing in action, misleading	1, 4, 7, 10
Repeated or consistent examples of incompetency	The leader had no clue what they were doing and inefficient, shirking, did not take responsibility for mistakes	1, 2, 5, 8, 10
Management Undermines employees	Puts me down, made me feel incompetent, belittled my ideas	All
Micromanagement people and tasks – used power to impact negatively on others	Closely monitored my daily work, excessive supervision, tries to control me	1, 3, 4, 5
Irresponsibility	Shirking, did not take responsibility for mistakes	1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 10
Consistently ignore feedback from subordinates	Blows me off, will not listen to my side of the story, will not respect me opinions and contributions	All
Leaders put personal ambition before employee development and organizational objectives	Will not mentor, train, support career development	1, 4, 9
<b>Experience in Environment</b>		
Devalued	Did not feel important, devaluation of my work and efforts	1, 3, 4
Poisoned morale, initiative, innovation, enthusiasm, creativity	Little trust, unmotivated, high turnover, no rewards, disrespect between team members	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9
Distrust of leader	Did not respect or trust the leader	All
Public humiliation/verbal abuse	Yelled, screamed, called names, fist fighting	6, 7
Disrupted/Diverted work	Created busy work and rework	1, 2, 3, 4, 10
Demeaning	talked down to me and was discounted, verbal abuse	1, 3, 4, 5, 6,
Manipulation - Personal Interests	Used false information to motivate the team, passive aggressive. Tried to control me.	1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10
Dysfunction/Chaos	The leader was incompetent, irresponsible, unhealthy behaviors and attitudes	All
<b>Personal Impact</b>		
Destroyed reputation	Bad leadership caused me look incompetent	1, 2, 3, 4, 10
Lowered Engagement	Did not value my work, so I did only what was expected, nothing more.	2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8
Stressed	Anxious, worried, difficulty focusing, tension	All
Avoidance	Avoided the boss to be left alone	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8
Emotional - crying	Cried at work and home from the abuse at work	1, 4, 6, 10
Lack of enjoyment	There was not fun in my work or home life. It was a job to pay the bills	3, 4, 5, 6,
Sunday night blues	Stressed on Sunday thinking about the up coming work week	1, 3, 4, 6, 7
Second guessed myself	Lost confidence in my ability	1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10
Depressed	Tired, withdrawn from friends and family, outlook is gloomy	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10
No work life balance	Spent more hours at work than at home with family and friends	All
Looking for other opportunities	Believed leaving the company was a way to protect myself	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

## Appendix G

## Copyright Approval for Susceptible Circle

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## Appendix H

## Copyright Approval for Toxic Triangle

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